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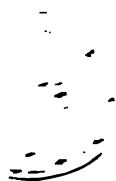
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AN OCEAN FREE-LANCE.

FROM A PRIVATEERSMAN'S LOG, 1812.

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL,

AUTHOR OF 'THE WRECK OF THE GROSVENOR,' ETC.

' Oh, who can tell, save he whose heart hath tried,
And danced in triumph o'er the waters wide,
The exulting sense—the pulse's maddening play
That thrills the wanderer of that trackless way ?
That, for itself can woo the approaching fight,
And turn what some deem danger to delight !'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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1881.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

FEW accounts of brilliant actions at sea exceed in interest those in which British privately-armed vessels were concerned. The schooner *Tigress* was a well-known privateer, and the name of Shelvocke, who commanded her down to December, 1814, stood high for courage, humanity, and an exact conformity to the terms of his Government commission.

Only a portion of her cruise is related in these pages, for her chief officer's connection with her ceased when he took charge of the *Namur*, and his narrative of the beautiful vessel's exploits is interesting only so far as he was an eye-witness of them.

Privateering was abolished in 1856, by the Declaration of Paris, that is to say, abolished for Great Britain, which is all of that Declaration that need concern Englishmen. A singularly able treatise on this subject, entitled 'Maritime Warfare,' has been written by Mr. Thomas Gibson Bowles, who shows with such force of reasoning as no man who chooses to consider the subject carefully can resist, that in sanctioning the abolition of privateering, Great Britain, as the principal maritime power in the world, has directly weakened her State Navy by depriving it of a valuable auxiliary, and by forfeiting, to quote Mr. Bowles's words, 'one of the best schools for the formation of adventurous and daring sailors.'



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AN OCEAN FREE-LANCE.

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN SHELVOCKE.

T was on a day in the summer of the year 1812, that being completely, and I may say mercifully, recovered from a long and trying illness, the seeds of which had been planted in me by a fever taken in Bombay twelve months before, I left my lodgings near Charing Cross to call upon a firm of ship-owners whose offices were in the City. When I was near Temple Bar, I observed a man look me very full and eagerly in the face; our eyes met, and I seemed to

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I

know him : but my mind being full of business, I was walking on without giving him further attention, when he came after me, and stopped me by laying his hand on my shoulder.

‘Madison!’ cried he ; ‘why, this is a real stroke of luck ! Only a minute ago I’d have given any man ten pounds to tell me how I might find you. Where have you been lying hidden all these months ? and where are you bound to now ?’

‘I am heartily glad to see you again, Captain Shelvocke,’ said I, shaking his hand cordially. ‘You’ll forgive me, I hope, for not immediately making out the old lines under that big beard. You have not forsaken the old *Bombay Castle*, I hope, sir ?’

‘You want to know as much as I do,’ he answered, laughing, ‘and I see there’s a yarn to be spun on both sides. But this pavement isn’t the quarter-deck of a ship, Madison, and the cockneys know how to use their elbows. Are you in a hurry ?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Then come along with me,’ said he, passing his arm through mine ; and he led me

across the road into a chop-house, full of bulk-headed boxes like the pews of a church, and a table in each box. It was hot in this place, for the ceiling was so low a short man might have touched it with his fingers; and the smell of cooked meat and the fumes of candles at the aftermost end, where the daylight was small, made the room like a cockpit in the tropics. Most of the boxes were occupied, but the place was quiet, the people talking low, and the attendants moving about leisurely. We seated ourselves in an empty box, and Shelvocke called for a couple of chops and a pint of Madeira. He then, with a peculiar smile, asked me if I had a ship.

‘No, sir; but I am out on that very business.’

‘Have you been ill?’ he inquired.

‘Very ill indeed, but, thank God! I am sound enough now.’

‘I guessed by your hands that you had been on the sick-list,’ said he. ‘They are as thin as a poet’s, and, flattery apart, your face is as tallowy as a Portugee’s. So you are going to look for a ship. As captain?’

I answered that if I was offered a captain’s

berth I certainly should not refuse it ; but that I did not hope to get more than a mate's post this time. He looked me steadfastly in the face, and leaning across the table and dropping his voice, said :

‘It seems intended by this meeting that we should sail together. How would you relish the notion of being mate of a privateer under my command ?’

‘I should like nothing better,’ I answered quickly.

‘By this proposal, Madison, I really intend a compliment. You and I are old shipmates, and know each other's calibre. Shall you ever forget our brush in the *Bombay Castle* with the French picaroon ? The recollection of your behaviour on that occasion brought you into my mind when this new command was given me, and I tell you frankly I should not have considered my complement complete had I been obliged to sail without you.’

I thanked him for his good words.

‘The mate I had intended to take is a smartish fellow,’ said he, ‘but no *fighter*—not a cur, but just a plain, sturdy merchantman. In a venture of this kind I must be well sup-

ported, and I mean to get a retiring pension out of it ; I intend that the French and our old friend Jonathan shall endow me, Madison, and your share should set you up as a squire—a regular, landed, stiff-rumped Tory, my lad—with a seat in the House and strong views on the illegality of privateering.’

He filled my glass, and we drank to each other. He was in high spirits, towards which his meeting with me had not a little contributed. When I had sailed with him in the *Bombay Castle* in 1809, he had worn shoulder-of-mutton whiskers ; but he had since let his beard and moustache grow, and his face looked as much like a lion’s as could very well be imagined of a human countenance. He was not handsome, though many persons admired the rugged strength and breadth of his massive features. His hair and beard were a dark red, his complexion brown with sun-burn, his eyes small, grey, and extraordinarily keen, brilliant, and steadfast in their gaze ; he stood a fraction over six feet high, and his limbs and shoulders were in perfect proportion with his stature. I knew him to be a fine seaman, a person of great resolution, and as brave as

any man of that age; and the manner in which he had engaged the French picaroon of which he had spoken, his own ship having only sixty men and mounting four eighteen-pound carronades, whilst the enemy had a crew of one hundred and thirty desperate fellows and carried three times our weight of metal, was an instance of daring and seamanship which will not readily be matched by examples drawn from actions in which merchantmen were engaged.

‘Will you ask some questions first?’ said he, ‘or shall we call it settled without palaver?’

‘Settled without palaver!’ I exclaimed. ‘I want no better chief than you, Captain Shelvocke.’

‘So!’ said he, whipping out a pocket-book: ‘Mr. Julian Madison, first mate of the *Tigress*, pay (so many) pounds a month while at sea and the usual share in prizes.’

He scratched this matter down, replaced the book, and we then turned to and ate our chops without further parley.

‘Phew!’ cried he; ‘this is too hot. There ought to be a room at the back yonder where

a man can breathe the London air through a skylight, and take a whiff of tobacco.'

He got up, and we went down the room and through a door into a small apartment. Some more wine was brought us, and Shelvocke drew a handful of cigars from his pocket, real Cuban leaf and exquisitely aromatic. After he had asked me several questions about the voyages I had taken since I left the *Bombay Castle*, and the nature of my illness, and if I stood in need of money, he said that, in consequence of having lost three very valuable cargoes, which had been seized by French privateers, Mr. Wilson Hannay, the head of the firm of Hannay, Meadows & Son, of East India Avenue, had purchased a brand-new, extremely beautiful and powerful vessel of three hundred and twenty-three tons burden, and rigged her as a schooner, and armed her with some very heavy metal for a craft of her size. She was called the *Tigress*, and her lines had been laid for blockade-running, though it was believed that she had been built for the Dey of Algiers, and her scantling resembled a frigate's. It was expected

that she would not only prove the fastest thing afloat, but one of the most weatherly.

‘However,’ said Shelvocke, ‘you will be seeing her soon, and then you can judge for yourself. If I can only get out of her two-thirds of the speed her lines promise, Hannay shall admit that he never invested money more wisely than when he bought her.’

‘How many men do you carry?’

‘Ninety; and there’s room for a hundred and fifty. I have four mates—yourself, first; Silas Chestree, second; Buck Tapping, third; and Philip Peacock, fourth. Do you know any of these men?’

‘No.’

‘They are all smart seamen, and have seen rough service. In work of this kind you want good navigators and plucky fellows for the prizes.’

‘When do you sail, sir?’

‘On Monday next, from the West India Docks, stopping at Erith to take in our powder. There has been some delay over the letter of marque, for the Admiralty people are growing scrupulous, and the description of the vessel had to be altered, for Hannay

meant at first to equip her with ten eighteens; but I prevailed upon him to substitute four forty-two pound carronades for close action, and a couple of heavy chasers. The whole adventure is the result of Hannay's rage over the loss of his ships. "See here, Shelvocke," said he, when he offered me the command of the *Tigress*, "a letter of marque, you know, means reprisals, and my motive in equipping this vessel is that she may sink or blow up or capture as many French and Yankee merchantmen as she can overhaul. I don't want any man-of-war work done. Give your heels to the cruisers, and leave the forts to the admirals. I wish you to make the enemy's pocket smart; and I shall be as well pleased to hear of the vessels you have sunk or burnt as of the vessels you have brought in as prizes."

'Rather vindictive!' said I, laughing.

'Ay,' he answered, with a twinkle in his eye; 'but if the enemy's pocket is to smart, it must be done by filling ours; and if we can see our way to enlarge the King's fleet by the addition of a sloop or two, we'll make the venture, Madison.'

‘Have you any particular cruising-ground in your mind, sir?’

‘I shall hang about the Channel for a spell, and see what’s to be got there. **Some** pickings ought to be **found** **between** Grisnez and Ushant. **But** the Bahama latitudes will be our later haunt, for the cotton ships bring a good bit of money.’ He then said that the tide would serve early on Monday morning, and that I need not be aboard before Sunday night.

The prospect of a cruise of this description pleased me greatly. My life had been passed in the merchant-service; and over and over again, when news of our brilliant successes at sea had reached me, I had groaned in spirit over the hum-drum monotony of my sea-faring experiences, the feeble chances they offered me of enriching myself or improving my position, and regretted that my father had not stuck to his original intention of entering me as a midshipman in the Navy instead of apprenticing me to a merchant captain.

Indeed, this was a period in the history of the Navy when merit and courage had chances such as had never before offered. In every

direction officers were being promoted and decorated ; prize-money was enriching hundreds, and laying the foundation of future fortunes ; the Gazettes were choked with the records of brilliant deeds, and the nation was filled with heroes. But these distinctions, as regards the sea, were limited to the Navy. Now and again, it is true, the master of a merchantman who had gallantly fought his ship against heavy odds, would receive a purse of money or a piece of plate ; but a great number of heroic exploits which, had they been performed by naval officers, would have earned them the thanks of the country and have loaded them with civic gifts and courtly honours, were unnoticed, and the only satisfaction these brave men received was the applause of their own conscience.

On the other hand, if but little glory attached to the actions of privateers there was a great deal of money to be made by that kind of work, and the life included all the dash and romance of the naval service without its biting restraints. A privateersman owned only his captain as master. He fought

for himself, but in fighting for himself he also fought for the British colours ; and I am bold enough to say that not a little of the influence exercised by the 'meteor flag' on the minds and nerves of the enemies of Great Britain was owing to the spirit and bravery of the English privateers of that age.

Shelvocke and I sat for an hour talking of our chances in the *Tigress*, and of the declaration of war against this country by the United States of America, the news of which had not long reached England. It was generally believed that there was more swagger than boldness in this declaration, and that Congress were only courting a terrible punishment. But Shelvocke did not take this view.

'It's not fashionable,' said he, 'and it certainly wouldn't be thought patriotic in an Englishman to speak a good word for the Yankees ; but I am not going to be led away by prejudice. Mark what I say—the Americans will not be swallowed up quite so easily as we true Britons imagine. The way in which they turned us out of their country and beat our ships in the last war shows the

sort of marrow they've got in their bones. To see a little cock, fresh and yellow from his shell, sparring up to, aye, and cornering a tough old rogue like John Bull is something to make one reflective. We shall be hearing 'Yankee Doodle' piped well to the east'ard of the Start before many weeks are over; and now that war is declared, I don't mind owning that I am thankful my estate is not in English bottoms.'

He got up after thus expressing himself, and appointing an hour for me to meet him next morning at the offices in East India Avenue, he shook me heartily by the hand, and we parted.



CHAPTER II.

THE TIGRESS.

I WAS much gratified by the eagerness with which Shelvocke had offered me a berth under him, and the pleasure my acceptance of it gave him. And so far as I was concerned, my meeting with him was extremely opportune, for, though I could still lay my hand on a little ready money, my illness had brought the locker low, and it was high time for me to be afloat. I had no wife, nor parents, nor relatives of any kind to give or make me a home in England, to link me to the land, nor to give significance to any sort of adventures I might have a mind to enter upon.

Being alone, I had leisure to think over my agreement with Shelvocke ; and the longer I

reflected upon it, the gayer grew the picture of the future. It would be a new life to me, full of dash, light, and activity. It was taking the whole ocean as a theatre for one's exploits. In imagination I felt and enjoyed the freedom of it. I pictured the chase, the rushing of white waters, the cloud of canvas soaring upon the horizon ahead, the flames and the thunder of guns, the rich capture, the dark nights, the crowd of determined men to command, the endless excitements of a roving commission, and an ocean swarming with enemies' ships.

With fancies of this kind I amused myself for the rest of the day ; and next morning, punctually to the hour of appointment, I presented myself at the offices of Hannay, Meadows & Son. Captain Shelvocke was waiting for me. He and Hannay were together in a private office, and I heard the sound of Hannay's voice before the door was opened.

This gentleman, who at that time was reckoned one of the wealthiest men in the city of London, and who filled several posts of honour and trust in connection with the

city companies and the corporation, was a fat red-faced man, with a great crop of perfectly white hair standing erect on his head, like the long grass in a field. He said he was glad to find me again in his employ—no doubt Shelvocke had been praising me, and I had not sailed in any ship owned by the firm since I quitted the *Bombay Castle*—but that he was afraid his conscience would trouble him for letting loose so bloodthirsty a man upon the French, much as he hated that people and eager as he was to have a hand in the destruction of their ships.

I answered that I hoped I should not be thought more bloodthirsty than I looked, and that I should not look more bloodthirsty than I was.

‘But you like fighting,’ said he, ‘don’t you?’

‘I shall always be willing to fight when occasion requires, sir,’ I answered.

‘No man can say more than that,’ exclaimed Shelvocke.

When the occasion to fight *does* arise,’ said Hannay, twisting the great seals under his waistcoat irritably, ‘you will please to remember, Mr. Madison, that the owner of the

Tigress has lost upwards of forty-eight thousand pounds through the French. That's a grievance, I submit, Shelvocke, big enough to sharpen a cutlass upon. The French owe me forty-eight thousand pounds, and, by heaven, gentlemen, the *Tigress's* cannon-shot shall make them liquidate !'

'We'll do our best for you, Mr. Hannay,' said Shelvocke. 'And now that I have Madison, I'll say, and I am glad he hears me, that never since privateering became a business, did any vessel go out of dock with a better company of men than the *Tigress* starts with.'

'I'll do my share too, Shelvocke,' exclaimed Hannay, walking up and down the room impetuously. 'You have my orders to stint nothing. Whatever may make your ship formidable, buy ! The small arms I left to you.'

'I'll warrant them, sir.'

'I am still of opinion you err in not taking in a load of dismantling-shot. Wicked ideas are not always *bad* ideas, sir. Star-shot are a Yankee notion I should like to see aboard the *Tigress*. Your business is to cripple,

whether you run or board, and star-shot will wreck a three-decker in twenty minutes if plied well.'

'Mr. Hannay, I would as soon load my guns with broken bottles and tenpenny nails. If round-shot, and grape, and canister can't do our business, we must give up,' exclaimed Shelvocke, with a little show of warmth.

Hannay looked at me as if he wished me to champion his views. But though I did not then know what star-shot were, I suspected a meanness in them, and held my peace.

'Well, Shelvocke,' said the old gentleman, with a bland smile that I thought clever, seeing how quick he was with it, 'you must e'en have your own way. But mark what I say—whatever may be thought of the *illegitimacy* of the Yankees' dismantling-shot, the British Navy will have to adopt sooner or later something that will wreck the spars of a ship more quickly than the missiles now in use. Can it be pretended that round and grape do half their work when we hear of ships coming out of engagements which have lasted for five and six hours with all their

spars aloft? I think the invention of the dismantling-shot a monstrous clever thing. One of them will split a sail in halves, or sever one side of the standing rigging of a mast as though a knife were drawn across the shrouds. Will you tell me that round-shot do this?’

‘Round-shot will do a deal of mischief, take my word for it, Mr. Hannay,’ replied Shelvocke; and evidently wishing to cut short a distasteful discussion, he pulled out his watch, and exclaimed :

‘Come, Madison, it is time to be off.’

We shook hands with Mr. Hannay, and turned into Leadenhall Street.

‘You would hardly suppose,’ said Shelvocke, drily, ‘that this advocate of a murderous invention is the founder and chairman of a Bible Society, that he has two sons in the Church, and that his friends quote him as a real example of benevolence, piety, and humanity. With all respect, I would see him hanged before I’d use the shot he recommends. Do you know what they are like?’

‘No.’

‘Imagine a dozen crowbars, each one about three feet long, slung on a big iron ring, the spikes being kept together like a fagot of wood by bits of spun yarn, which are burnt by the discharge. That’s one kind of dismantling-shot. Such things, no doubt, cut up the rigging of vessels, but I question if they do more injury to spars than round-shot. Their worst mischief lies among the men; they wound in the ghastliest way in the world. To use such shot is as bad, in my opinion, as poisoning an enemy’s scuttle-butts. I am sorry that the Yankees, as an English-speaking people, should stoop to shin-kicking of this kind. With all Johnny Frenchman’s faults, he is above-board; and when he *does* fight, he fights fair.’

But though all this might be true enough, Shelvocke forgot in abusing the Yankees for employing what he considered, and what no doubt was, an unfair weapon, that the English had been willing to adopt a clock-work submarine engine that was designed to blow up the enemy’s vessels with all hands aboard as they lay at anchor; though I admit that St. Vincent condemned the invention as inhuman,

and predicted its failure. Nor in our wars have we scrupled to use fire-ships full of explosive material, and other infernal machines, the object of which was to destroy, without imperilling our own limbs, as much human life and property as such dastardly contrivances could come at. The truth is we hated the Americans so bitterly in those days, that we never could find words sufficiently expressive of our detestation of even the tricks they had borrowed from our own methods of warfare. I do not defend any of the stratagems practised, and the unfair weapons employed by the Yankees during their wars with this country ; but I say that our condemnation of them comes very foolishly from us, who are accountable for more human lives destroyed by desperate and bloody inventions than any other nation on the face of the earth. As an instance, I knew a person who had sailed under Lord Cochrane, who assured me that he had often heard his lordship say he had a scheme by which he could decoy and kill a hundred thousand men, without risking a single life on our side. There never was, nor is there in this day, a braver officer than

Cochrane ; but will it be doubted that his scheme would have been submitted and adopted but for his unhappy quarrel with the Admiralty, by which the nation was deprived of the services of this brilliant, determined and skilful seaman ?

The West India Docks were full of ships, many of them Indiamen and South Traders who, I was told, were loading as part of a great convoy that was to rendezvous at Torbay in the middle of August. The scene of the docks was very brilliant, for among the ships there was a great variety of build, and it was a sight to contrast the old Indiamen with their tall poops and overhanging quarter-galleries, their tops big enough to build a house in, their apple-shaped bows, and huge uncouth stems, and freeboards like the sides of a hill, with the modern long, low, piratical-looking vessels, many of which had been taken from the French, and the models of which the English shipbuilders were at last beginning to understand and imitate ; while the whole surface of the sky over the docks was a mass of quivering colour with the snake-like pulling of the long streamers from the

mast-heads, and the flags and ensigns rippling at the peaks and the flagstuffs on the bowsprits and over the stern.

A man used to these peaceful times, or rather, I should say, to the change that has come over the spirit of the mercantile marine, would have been rather astonished by the formidable exhibition of guns aboard some of these homely traders, the shot piled round the hatches, the small-arms racks abaft the main-mast, and the resolute *fighting* cut of the crews at work upon the various vessels. After we had come to a certain place in the docks where we commanded a view of a large number of ships, Shelvocke grasped my arm and stopped me.

‘Madison,’ said he, ‘you have a sharp eye. Look about you and tell me which vessel is the *Tigress*.’

There were several schooners in the docks, some of them large vessels, very smart and taut aloft, and most of them fairly answering to the description Shelvocke had given me of his ship. But I did not require to look about me long before hitting on my craft. We were five minutes’ walk from her, but even at tha

distance she was instantly distinguishable by a sailor as the loveliest vessel in the docks. She was lying alongside a high squab Indian, whose yards were braced up to allow the schooner to sit close ; but the contrast was of little use to the *Tigress* ; you needed to see her clear of all surroundings, alone upon the water, to do justice to her beautiful fabric.

‘ That should be your schooner, captain,’ said I, pointing to her.

‘ Yes, that’s the *Tigress*. Is she not something to set a man’s heart dancing ?’ he exclaimed, in a voice as impassioned as a lover’s in speaking of his mistress, and forcing me to smile by the energy and intensity of it. ‘ See,’ he said, drawing me a few paces forward and then stopping me afresh, ‘ you catch her run here. Do you mark the swell of her side, the beauty of that faint inward curve from the water’s edge to the rail of the bulwark ? Observe how she tapers aft, until you might think it impossible that a gun could be trained through the stern-port. She has no channels to drag through the water, do you notice ? Those chain-plates, with the

dead-eyes coming inboard, strengthen the bulwarks, and are greasy things for a boarder's hands, whilst her beam gives a noble spread to the shrouds. But come along!' he cried, breaking into a laugh, and staring around him, 'or they'll be taking me for some itinerant parson hired by Buonaparte to denounce the wickedness of fighting for one's country.'

We walked to the schooner, and boarded her by scrambling over the Indiaman, whose decks were lumbered by a crowd of men swinging bales of goods into her capacious hold.

The *Tigress* was flush fore and aft, her main-hatchway small, and I never remember seeing such a roomy deck as hers. Her beam was twenty-seven feet, and her length a hundred and nine feet. She mounted a twenty-four-pounder on the forecastle, where there was plenty of room to work it. All her fining, indeed, was under water. Both the height and thickness of her bulwarks were unusual, for Shelvocke, six foot as he was, could only just see over the rail, and the gun-ports looked like embrasures in the walls of a

castle. She carried six eighteen-pounders, three of a side, and four forty-two-pound carronades, as well as the two twenty-four chasers, making in all twelve guns. Her mainmast was eighty-four feet high, and the height from the deck to the topmast-head was very nearly a hundred and fifty feet; and as I glanced aloft at her magnificent spars, with the square-rig forward tapering into a little sky-sail-yard, and studding-sail boom-irons as high as her top-gallant-yard, I had no trouble to guess the spacious folds of canvas she would be able to throw open to the wind when occasion required them. Her hull was painted black, with a very narrow white streak running along the sides just under the gun-ports. She sat low on the water, and would be lower yet when completely victualled and her crew aboard. But for her beam, her low free-board would have threatened a wet ship in a sea-way; but deep as she lay, her copper sheathing came a foot above the point of immersion, and the metal sparkled like new gold.

‘What do you think of her?’ asked Shel-

vocke, whose eyes had been fixed on my face whilst I noted these points.

‘I think that for beauty and strength she’s a wonder, sir,’ I answered, ‘and worthy to become a famous name.’

‘*That* we’ll make her—at least among the mounseers!’ he exclaimed, laughing. ‘You can overhaul her below if you like, Mr. Madison,’ giving me the stiff *mister* on his own quarter-deck. ‘I have to see a man on the *Palatine* lying yonder, but shall be aboard again presently.’ And so saying, he went over the side.

The only man I had yet noticed on the schooner was an old sailor, who stumped up and down the starboard side of the forecastle with the regularity of a pendulum, occasionally pausing to squirt a quantity of tobacco-juice from his mouth over the bulwarks. I walked to the companion, and went down the steps, noticing how the strength of the vessel’s build was exhibited in the smallest detail, the brass handrail being as thick as a man’s arm, and the scantling of the companion almost as stout as the bulwarks of a hundred-ton sloop. On arriving at the

bottom of the ladder, I found myself in a small cabin, lighted by a flat skylight overhead. The cabin was bulkheaded all around into berths, and against the partition dividing the after-cabin from the room used by the surgeon and the third and fourth mates, was a stand of muskets, cutlasses, and pikes, which gave a very grim and warlike look to the plain, dark-brown, and powerfully constructed interior.

A young man, who was reading at the table in the centre of the cabin, got up as I came down, and stared at me with an expression of surprise. He was as tall as Captain Shelvocke, but for angularity and gauntness and general uncouthness I never saw his like ; in short, he might have stood for the figure of the French musketeer in Hogarth's print of 'Calais Gates.' His immensely long legs when he was erect exactly resembled a pair of compasses clothed in ill-fitting trousers, and his monkey-jacket being unusually short, the length of his legs was proportionately exaggerated. His ebony-coloured hair was brushed down like a horse's tail, some inches below the collar of his coat ; his dark, gleam-

ing eyes were sunk deep in his head, and his capacious mouth appeared to extend the whole breadth of his jaws.

‘Hallo, shipmate!’ he exclaimed, in a hard, gruff voice, ‘where are you bound to? Your road home doesn’t lie this way, does it?’

‘Who the devil are you?’ said I.

‘You ask the question so civilly that I don’t mind telling you,’ he answered, with a grin that exposed a tremendous broadside of grinders. ‘I’m the second mate of this vessel; and if you’ve got any business to transact, please to let us hear of it.’

‘Then your name is Mr. Silas Chestree?’ said I.

‘At your service,’ he replied, making as if he would sit.

‘My name is Mr. Julian Madison,’ said I; ‘and when I tell you I am chief mate of the *Tigress*, perhaps you’ll be good enough to use me with a little civility.’

‘Chief mate! I’m very sorry, sir,’ he exclaimed, pulling off his hat and throwing it on the table. ‘It was impossible for me to guess who you were, sir. I understood from

Captain Shelvocke that Mr. Hollings was to be chief mate.'

'Captain Shelvocke has done me the honour to appoint me in the room of Mr. Hollings,' said I. 'However, you are not to blame, Mr. Chestree, as I should have introduced myself to you at once. As it is to be shoulder to shoulder with us all, we'll shake hands.'

He squeezed my fingers with a grip that made them almost bloodless, and seemed to think himself very fortunate that I should overlook his rudeness so quickly and easily.

Accompanied by this officer, I took advantage of Shelvocke's absence to thoroughly inspect the vessel, noting every point for my own satisfaction, and with the intention of indicating any weakness I might come across. Mr. Chestree told me that all the work had been done by the dockyard people, and that the crew were coming aboard on Saturday. He said Captain Shelvocke had found no difficulty in obtaining a crew; indeed, upwards of two hundred men had offered, on hearing that the vessel that wanted seamen was the *Tigress*, and that the pick of them,

every man being a native of Great Britain, had been selected, and that there were not above five boys among the whole lot of them. The more critically I inspected the schooner, the more she pleased me. Every improvement that had been suggested by the long maritime wars in which England had been engaged was adopted. The only doubt I had, was whether she was not too heavily armed for speed, although I could not question the value of the long guns in the event of being chased by the large frigates and line-of-battle ships which the French had launched broadcast upon the seas.

In about an hour's time, Captain Shelvocke came aboard again, and took me into his cabin, where we had a long talk over the schooner and her equipment, and the plans he had in his mind. He was very sanguine, and believed that he should be able to achieve any end he designed with such a vessel as the *Tigress* under him. He said that he meant to have a very strict discipline maintained, and that he should look to me to help him to get as good a character for the schooner as any that was owned by the best-

managed ships of war in the English service.

‘There is no denying,’ said he, ‘that privateering has got to be thought a kind of legalised piracy, and the notion is not unjust. But I don’t intend to let the *Tigress* get a reputation of that kind. We’ll capture what we can, but we’ll capture honestly, and earn our money as gentlemen. Our rules must be tenderness to women, kind treatment to prisoners, and no act that shall subject my letter of marque to revocation.’

He produced his commission as he said this and ran his eye over it, making comments as he went along.

‘It’s a *carte blanche*, Madison,’ said he. ‘In consequence of the insults and provocations his Britannic Majesty has experienced from the Government of France, he has ordered that general reprisals be granted against the goods, ships and subjects of that nation.’

‘And small blame to him for that, sir,’ said I. ‘The French luggers would provoke the Archbishop of Canterbury into turning privateersman.’

‘Especially if his grace happened to be a


ship-owner. So,' continued he, looking at his commission, 'in consequence of these insults and provocations, his Majesty has thought proper to permit Robert Shelvocke to equip, furnish, and victual a schooner called the *Tigress*, and to authorise him by force of arms to play the devil among the merchantmen owned by the enemies of his Majesty the King of Great Britain and Ireland, which the said Robert Shelvocke, being a loyal Briton, undertakes to do to the utmost of his ability, as much for the honour and glory of his country as for the filling of his own and the pockets of the people who are associated with him. So there you have the substance of a letter of marque,' said he, returning the document to his pocket-book, 'which, deprived of parliamentary language, means, Seize what you can, and what you can't pocket, destroy.'

Laughing as he said this, he got up, and calling to Chestree, gave him some instructions; and after keeping me waiting on deck whilst he wrote a letter in his cabin, we left the schooner and made our way out of the Docks.



CHAPTER III.

THE CHASE OF THE ARMED LUGGER.

 HE crew joined on Saturday, and when I came aboard on the following evening I learnt that not a single man was missing. The decks forward were filled with seamen when I arrived, and their sweethearts and wives having been allowed to spend the evening with them, the crowd was a dense one. Here was a bushy-whiskered sailor nursing his little child, coddling and tossing it, while his wife hung over his back, silently crying: yonder a pretty girl was exhorting her sweetheart with all manner of passionate gestures: husbands and wives sat together talking earnestly. The whole scene was a remarkable picture, with the varied costumes of the men and

women and children contrasting with the sand-white decks, the rows of sullen guns, the wand-like masts shooting into the blue sky, the gleam of the red evening sunlight in the metal work, the ships moored ahead and astern of us, their shadows hanging in the water as though they reposed upon a bed of looking-glass, and their interlaced rigging soaring like cobwebs into the heavens.

Shelvocke had told me he would not join the schooner until early on Monday morning, as he was to spend Sunday evening with Mr. Hannay. I went below to put my berth to rights, and found the square box allotted to me as convenient and comfortable as I had a right to expect in a vessel of the tonnage of the *Tigress*. There was no room to swing a hammock, but my legs were not too long for the bunk, or sleeping-shelf, and a sailor has no right to ask for more.

When I went on deck again I found the three mates aft, and joined them. Mr. Buck Tapping, the third officer, was a square, very powerfully built young man, with a face like a prize-fighter's, long muscular arms, and short legs. He had a scar across his left cheek,

which he told me he had received in a struggle with a fleet of Malay pirates. There was a remarkable expression of audacity in his eyes. The fourth mate, Mr. Peacock, on the other hand, looked almost effeminate with his slender build, small white fingers, and smooth, thin, handsome face. His teeth were beautifully white and even, his eyes large, dark and melancholy, his hair a rich auburn. He looked more like a poet than a sailor, and the last man I should have thought fit for privateering. He interested me immediately. I asked him how long he had been to sea ?

‘Since I was ten years old, sir,’ he answered, with his sweet smile.

‘And pray how old are you now, Mr. Peacock ?’

‘Nineteen, sir.’

‘Why, you have been to sea almost as long as I have!’ I exclaimed. ‘The sun seems to have used you kindly,’ referring to his delicate complexion.

Yet Chestree afterwards informed me that this same youth, girlish as he looked, had performed as gallant an action as any on record : he had been apprentice on board an

Indiaman that was attacked by a heavily-armed French sloop off the south coast of Ceylon. The yard-arms of the two vessels got locked. Three times the crew of the Indiaman endeavoured to board the enemy, and were repulsed. At last little Peacock, shouting out for followers, sprang aloft, ran along the main-topsail-yard of his own ship, and, with half a dozen men behind him, gained the fore-top-sail-yard of the sloop, drove a crowd of small-arms men out of the fore-top, and reached the enemy's deck unperceived amidst the smoke. Their presence terrified the Frenchmen, a number of whom ran below ; the crew of the Indiaman boarded in the confusion, and while the seamen of the two ships fought like devils on the deck of the sloop, Peacock went aloft and cut away the colours, on seeing which the crew of the sloop supposed their captain had struck and threw down their arms.

Glancing from the officers to the men, it seemed to me quite reasonable that Shelvocke should boast of his complement. Of course an eye used to the uniformity of the dress of men-of-war's men could have wished for less

diversity of costume among the men of the *Tigress*. But no private owner could afford to give clothes as well as wages. Still, as I said to Chestree, the *Tigress* would have been the better for the finishing touch of a uniform dress among the crew ; for, though the motley costumes did not in the least damage the fine appearance of the men, yet to see some in red shirts, others in blue shirts, others again in jackets and waistcoats, some wearing fishermen's caps, some high hats, and some sou'westers, took away that sense of orderliness, discipline and regularity which, of themselves, the white decks, the heavy guns, the exquisite trim of the gear aloft suggested, and even gave the schooner a piratical air.

‘ But they’ll look all one, sir,’ said Chestree to me, ‘ when they come to strip for an engagement.’

Captain Shelvocke came aboard next morning a little after eight o’clock, and the tide serving, we hauled out of the Docks, and dropped down to Erith, where we brought up and took in our powder.

It was a very bright, hot day, with a small breeze from the north-west. A whole crowd

of people stood looking at us from the shore, and I noticed the crews of the vessels which passed up or down as we lay at anchor point to us, and by many gestures express the admiration that the beautiful fabric of the schooner excited in them. The powder was all aboard and stowed by half-past eleven, when the capstan was manned, the anchor lifted, and, with flowing sheets and all her fore and aft canvas set, the *Tigress* went smoothly over the surface of the Thames, the water of which hereabouts was like molten silver, dazzling with the play of sunlight upon it, and scarcely blurred by the breeze.

Every man of us knew that this was the schooner's first run, and that her pace remained to be proved ; and the men's eyes were constantly aloft, or over the side, or upon the land, to see how fast it slipped by.

The tide was beginning to ebb, but it was scarcely worth noticing, though what little trickle there was favoured us. Had the schooner been a mere trader, no one would have troubled himself to think of her pace with such a languid air as was now stirring

overhead; but for privateering, the best vessels are those which sail fastest with the least wind, as any man knows who has chased a cloud of flying kites, or who has been within range of the guns of a big enemy with not enough air to chill the skin of a moistened finger; and we were as anxious to discover the *Tigress's* slipping powers in little better than a calm as we should have been to judge her capacity of forereaching and weathering in a gale of wind.

‘There is no air down here,’ said Shelvocke, joining me at the gangway, ‘and the tide is certainly not yet running a quarter of a knot. Yet look at the shore! It is going past quicker than a man can run. We shall be opening Gravesend in twenty minutes.’

‘Shall I heave the log, sir?’

‘Why, yes, Mr. Madison. It will give us some idea of the speed.’

The log was hove by the third officer, who reported four and a half knots.

‘There must be more wind than we think,’ said Shelvocke, looking both astonished and delighted, ‘or else the tide strengthens. Get

the square canvas on her, and try her with that.'

A number of men sprang into the fore-shrouds.

'Stand by to sheet home! Overhaul your clew-lines!'

In less than a couple of minutes all three sails were loosed, the sheets and halliards manned, and the canvas set. The men worked without noise, and to the piping of a boatswain's mate. Nothing was ever more smartly rushed aboard of a man-of-war.

'Get the square-sail on her, Mr. Madison, and let her have all three studding-sails!' sung out Shelvocke.

Though we should not be able to carry these last sails long, for a bend of the river would bring them to leeward presently, yet the experiment of setting them was worth the trouble, and in a few moments the polished surface of the water reflected the brilliance of the shining cotton-white cloths, cut to perfection, and depending in graceful forms many feet beyond the vessel's side. The square-sail was an enormous stretch of canvas, big

enough to hold a gale of wind. These extra cloths increased the speed to six knots.

‘I think I told you,’ said Shelvocke to me, ‘that the *Tigress* would prove to be the fastest thing afloat. I call this a real miracle. Look at that big cutter yonder. We are approaching her as though she were a buoy.’

He pointed to a large vessel a little on our starboard bow that we were overhauling as though she were stationary. She was a Margate hoy, a lumping sloop, with a deck-load of passengers between her rails. We had our gun-ports raised, and no doubt made a formidable as well as a noble show with the tompions choking the iron throats of the grinning guns, and the snow-white mountain of canvas topping the low, long, black, beautifully-moulded hull. The people on the hoy crowded her side to have a look at us, and her skipper clambered on to the after-rail and stared at us with his mouth open, amazed, as he well might be, at the way in which we were passing him, and looked up at our canvas, and then around him, as though endeavouring to find out where the wind that propelled us came from.

I have seen a good many vessels of all sorts and sizes in my time, from the Frenchman's four-decker to the Algerine felucca, and it is not therefore easy to guess why the picture of that Margate hoy should have printed itself strongly enough on my mind to last all these years. Yet I see her now in fancy as clearly as I saw her then in reality. Perhaps the contrast between the mission of these peaceful holiday-seekers and our own bloody and destructive errand may have emphasised the little hooker to my imagination. There was such fat and placid contentment in the line of faces that crowded her side as was extremely pleasant to behold. There was the sound of a flute aboard, and there were children dancing in the bows, and most of the people were eating their dinners out of paper bags, munching like ruminant animals as they looked at us. It was a picture of old-fashioned life that has quite vanished. The hoy was a chubby boat, rather slatternly rigged, with a big jack on a flag-post over her stern. Her image was beautifully reflected in the water under her, with the row of gleaming faces over her rail. Her skipper called

out to know where we were going, and Shelvocke answered 'To blow up a few Frenchman,' whereat the men cheered and waved their hats, and the women kissed their hands to us and fluttered their pocket-handkerchiefs.

We slipped by her as swiftly and silently as a shark glides along the side of a ship becalmed on the equator, and presently opened the merry little town of Gravesend, with its windows sparkling in the sunshine, and the outline of the green lands beyond waving like a serpent in the hot and steamy air.

I had some fear that the wind would fail us, in which case we should have been forced to bring up ; but quite unexpectedly it breezed up across the flat Essex lands, and the water was all awobble with it. There was a very handsome thirty-eight gun frigate, of French extraction, as any man might have known by the curl of the bows and the florid decorations of her quarter-galleries, and the lavish carving upon her stern, lying abreast of Gravesend ; and near her were a couple of East Indiamen, newly arrived, with the rust of their long voyage upon their sides, and their canvas

very clumsily stowed. The effect our vessel produced was exhibited in the rush of the crews of these ships to look at us as we went by. We were to windward of them, so that, from their point of view, the *Tigress* showed to the utmost advantage. The bend of the river had brought the wind right abeam, and with enough inclination of her masts to prove that she was in earnest, the schooner was ripping up the lustrous water with her stem as a sharp knife divides a length of satin. Every sail was full and round, the studding-sails tearing at the booms as though they were clouds seeking to blow away into the liquid blue heavens. She raised no foam, but amid the humming of the summer wind sweeping under the foot of the huge main-sail, one could hear the soft singing of swiftly passing waters, like the beating on musical-glasses heard at a distance, or the clanging of a bell mingling with the rustling of leaves. The vessels at anchor went whirling past us, coming stem on, and then presenting their starboard broadsides as we swept forwards. We seemed to keep pace with the very shadows of the clouds upon the land. It is true that the *Tigress* had now

every possible advantage : perfectly smooth water, a steady breeze, and every sail set with the exception of her sky-sail : still her qualities both in a light air and in a pleasant breeze had been tested ; and that she had marvellously fine keen heels was proved to the satisfaction of every man aboard of her.

Indeed there was not one of the crew but understood the significance of these tests, seeing the perilous fun her captain was likely to poke her into ; and that not only our fortune, but our lives also, must often depend on her running powers. And the beautiful schooner had already won the hearts of her men. I could see some of them hanging over her bows, and slapping their thighs as they watched the gleaming swirl of water spreading out from her stem, until it was three fathoms distant by the time it was on the quarter, whilst others pointed out the trim and cut of the canvas and the stay of her long masts, and others looked at the land that was drawing away on either bow, and commented in audible tones upon the rapidity with which one familiar place after another opened and slid

abeam, and went away out of sight upon the broadening waters astern.

A little after six we were abreast of Sheerness, and another hour of this sailing would put the waters of the English Channel under our fore-foot. The wind had veered due north, and was blowing a gay breeze. The square canvas had been furled, and the *Tigress* was beginning to feel the faint swell running into the mouth of the river from the wider ocean beyond, and to tumble a small surface of foam from her bows, as she ran over the light undulations. It was a glorious evening, the land a dim, delicate green away on the starboard hand, and the sun going down over our stern, filling the water all that way with a strong yellow light, whilst to the left the sea stretched in a tremulous dark blue surface, flaked with little spurts of foam. There was a small cutter a couple of miles to leeward, like a snow-flake on the sea, with English colours hoisted, but she was the only vessel in sight.

I went below to get a cup of tea, leaving the captain and Mr. Tapping on deck. I found Chestree talking to young Peacock,

whom he had called into the cabin, and the second mate asked me if I had heard where we were going to cruise. I answered that I believed we should hang about the Channel for some days, but that Captain Shelvocke had not fully opened his mind to me on the subject.

‘I hope he will give us some cutting-out jobs, sir,’ said Peacock, his soft girlish smile and the white hand he raised to push back the soft auburn hair from his forehead making his wish somehow sound extremely odd. ‘And one would like the *Tigress*, before she turns trader—which I suppose, when peace is declared, will be her vulgar destiny—to capture a French seventy-four——’

‘A French what?’ shouted Chestree, opening his great mouth.

‘A French seventy-four, I said,’ repeated the handsome young fellow, in a melodious voice, and looking at me with his dark, melancholy eyes. ‘There ought to be no difficulty in capturing the largest national ship afloat.’

Here Chestree was interrupting.

‘Pray let Peacock have his say, Chestree,’ said I.

‘Frenchmen fight well with their guns, sir, and usually give a fair account of an English crew at point-blank distance, all things considered. But there are no people in the world among whom a panic is more easily excited. They come into action with an English vessel *prepared* to be beaten. The secret of thrashing a big crew of Frenchmen by a small crew of Englishmen is to give the mounseers a fright, sir.’

He saw me laughing, and stopped, blushing to the roots of his hair.

‘Pray continue, Mr. Peacock,’ said I, recovering my gravity.

‘It was the idea of the captain of the last ship I was in,’ said he, glancing at Chestree to make sure that he was listening seriously, ‘that among every small crew there should be three or four men selected on account of their disagreeable voices.’

‘Hang me if ever I heard of such a thing!’ exclaimed Chestree, looking with a kind of admiration at the boy.

‘His notion was to dress these fellows like Frenchmen, and after the action had commenced and the English had got their ship

into a position to board, the Frenchified Britons were to drop into the water and swim round to the unprotected side of the enemy, scramble into her, and get among the crew, who, in the confusion, would suppose them some of their own people who had fallen overboard. Once on the enemy's decks, it would be the business of these fellows to raise false alarms, and create a panic with their horrible cries.'

'Ay, ay,' said Chestree, 'all that sounds very well in talk, but to make any use of your transmogrified Britons would require what the Germans call a neat conjunction of circumstances. And pray how are your fellows going to scramble up the sides of a three-decker? Answer me that, my fine fellow.'

'How? with their hands. They *must* get up, sir!' exclaimed Peacock, with a flushed face.

'But suppose they *can't*?' persisted Chestree.

'Why, then,' said I, 'the ruse must fail, of course. But even should it succeed once in ten times, I should consider it by no means a bad idea.'

‘It was twice tried by the same captain,’ said Peacock, ‘and was each time successful.’

‘Were you there to see?’ quoth Chestree.

‘No, sir, but I’ll answer for its efficacy. The first time two fellows got aboard the Frenchman dripping wet, and one of them shouted out, “The captain’s surrendered! the ship’s on fire! lay down your arms!”’

‘What, in French?’ said I.

‘Yes, sir. And they *did* lay down their arms. The second time was not immediately successful, for the man was shot in the act of grasping the flag-halliards. But half the crew believed the alarm given was true, and a good many of them jumped overboard, and the English got possession easily.’

‘There goes the bos’un’s pipe for all hands!’ exclaimed Chestree, jumping up and unfolding his long body as he soared out of his chair, like a boa-constrictor lifting its head.

The clear whistle came shrilly down through the open skylight, and we all ran on deck. The sun was near his setting, and the water astern of us lay like a sheet of

sparkling gold under the ardent light. The land to leeward, shelving away down to Shelness Point, was just a mere greenish film, and stretching out upon our port-bow was the horizon of the North Sea. The breeze had moderated again, and the schooner, with a slight inclination of her masts, was running as noiselessly as the shadow of a cloud over the long-drawn tender undulations of the water, that in places was shifting its blue into dark green, whilst the sea in the east, towards which we headed, was a dark violet, and hazy where it met the sky.

The whole of the ship's company had assembled on the main-deck, and I had now an opportunity of judging the full strength and appearance of the crew. There were ninety men in all, not counting officers, and a determined, hearty set of fellows they looked. They filled the deck from abaft the foremast, and presented a perfect bulwark of broad chests and whiskered faces. The suggestion of their physical qualities was prodigiously helped by the rows of long guns which flanked them on either hand; and as they stood in the setting sunshine, the shadows of the deli-

cate rigging lacing their figures and lying in slender bars upon the white decks, while the mould of the vessel was beautifully defined by the black line of the bulwarks against the darkening surface of the waters, and the tapering bows, terminating in the long bowsprit and jibboom, that arched-out like a wand over the deep, as though a magician stood in the head of the schooner and pointed the way, from which the jibs soared in rounded curves—methought I had never witnessed a more picturesque scene, nor one fitter to brighten a man's eye and set his heart dancing.

Shelvocke threw the end of his cigar overboard, and, coming forward, got upon the flag-locker that stood lashed in front of the skylight, in order that he might see over the heads of the men in the van of the crowd. Everybody was as quiet as death, and there was not a sound aloft, for the wind held the sails as steady as though they had been carved in marble, and the only audible noise was the cool tinkling of water under the bows.

‘My lads,’ said Shelvocke, looking a fine imposing man, as he stood erect, and extend-

ing his right hand, and speaking in a voice the subdued power of which made me guess what its full force would be, 'I have called you aft, not to listen to a speech—for I'm a plain sailor without the gift of the gab—nor do I mean to tell you what your duty is, for that, I take it, you know, but merely to hear what my plans are. My purpose is to do as much mischief as I can to the enemy's merchant-ships, and to fill our pockets with the fruits of their industry, as they have filled their's at the expense of ours. We have the Yankees as well as the French to work upon, and we must hope for some decent pickings, men. At the same time it is not my intention to lead you into needless perils. Our business is not to engage Government vessels, but to capture cargoes. But should I ever think it necessary for the honour of the glorious flag under which we sail, to show the enemy that we are as little afraid of his ships of war as we are of his merchantmen, I shall hope to be nobly supported by you. It may be our luck, some time or other, to restore to privateering a little of the credit that belonged to it before English seamen took their notions

from costagardas and picaroons. Anyway, we shall always endeavour to act like Englishmen, and though we are not allowed to carry a pennant at the mast-head, the smartness and the discipline aboard our little *Tigress* shall make her an example for ships whose quarter-decks sparkle with epaulets.'

This simple but, as I thought, judicious harangue raised a cheer; the crew were then divided into watches, and the starboard watch went below. I now saw that the routine to be observed was precisely the same as that of the merchant service. This, on the whole, was a wise plan, since every man aboard, from the captain to the youngest boy, had been bred in trading vessels, and would work more easily in the customs he was used to, than in a system borrowed from the Navy. I therefore found myself at the head of the port watch, with Tapping as my sub; whilst Chestree and Peacock took the starboard, or captain's watch.

It was a little after eight o'clock, the night as clear as silver with the moon, in whose white light the shadows of the rigging on the deck looked like drawings in India ink on

marble. We were abreast of the North Foreland, heading so as to fetch the Goodwin Sands to the eastward. The breeze was blowing very languidly, and what there was of it was over the stern. On the starboard hand the Kentish cliffs hung pallid and beetling on the sea-line.

The watch on deck were grouped about the forward guns, and the men on the look-out paced the forecastle with the regularity of machines. One would have thought that the *Tigress* had been six months at sea, so *settled* was the look of everything, so completely had the men adjusted themselves to the new craft. Yet it seemed strange to me, who was used to big Indiamen, to feel that here we were sailing along without a destination. The moonlight flooding the sea in the south gave us a wide range of horizon, but nothing was in sight, nor was it very likely that we should meet with anything good for our account hereabouts.

We held on in this way for about an hour until we had brought the north end of the Goodwins abeam of us, and there lay these deadly sands running in a dark line athwart

the reflection of the moonlight, and the water so quiet that not the merest purring of breaking ripples reached the ear. Shelvocke, an inveterate smoker, was puffing at a cigar near the tiller, and presently he called me to him.

‘After what we have seen of the schooner’s behaviour in the river to-day,’ said he, ‘and the way in which she slides now, with no more wind aloft than a lady’s fan would raise, I think that we may have confidence enough in her heels to stand in to the French shore. Even the capture of a coaster would hearten the men, and at all events anything French (unless it be the privateers) that swims without consort is pretty sure to keep the forts close aboard.’

‘As we go we head dead for the coast below Dunkirk, sir.’

‘Ay, it is a pity the moon isn’t astern of us. She smothers everything in the south, and shows us up against the water in the north. But this is beautiful weather, Mr. Madison. I never tasted softer air, and the discharge of meteors might make a man think he is in the Malacca Straits. Those guns give the decks a solemn look, don’t they? But yon-

der's the boy I pin my faith to,' said he, pointing to the twenty-four-pounder.

'No vessel sighting us would believe that a vessel of our tonnage carried such metal.'

'No, I don't say we are not overweighted, but a gale of wind will have to prove that. If I discover that we have too much iron top-hamper I shall drop a couple of the eighteens, and two of the carronades may follow if the necessity arises. But I will stick to my long Toms. I'd rather mount a couple of heavy guns than a whole broadside of the pea-shooters which the Admiralty are furnishing to their small craft. I haven't a word to say against carronades for close action, but what use can a man make of pieces which will not carry much farther than a boy can sling a stone?'

I was about to make some answer, when I thought I saw a flash of light down in the west of south, that dyed that part of the horizon with a pale blue glare.

'Was that lightning or a gun?' I exclaimed.

'Where away?' he asked quickly.

I pointed over the line of sand that barred

the silver water. He peered, and we both listened. No report followed, but in a few moments there was another sharp glare.

‘There’s a flash of guns in the south’ard, sir!’ sung out one of the men on the look-out.

Presently we saw another faint flash; and I thought, but I could not be sure, that I heard the rumble of an explosion.

‘Put your helm up, and let her go off a bit,’ said Shelvocke to the fellow who was steering. ‘Keep her at south half west. So. Mr. Madison, get the fore and after sheets eased off, and loose the square canvas.’

This, with the topsail, jib and topmast studding-sail, increased our progress; but the night was so still, and the movements of the schooner so quiet, that, as she rose and sank upon the gentle swell that tenderly swung along the bosom of the water out of the north-east, one would never have imagined that she was making headway, until, by looking over the side, one saw the bubbles in the moonlight slipping past, and heard the delicate churning of the water under the counter.

We kept a bright look-out, but no more

flashes were seen. This cessation convinced me that the glare had been produced by guns, for had it been lightning, there would have been more of it. By this time the north-end of the Goodwins was well on the starboard quarter, and the line of sands running away at an angle from our jib-boom. By order of the captain I went forward with a glass, and climbed as high as the fore topgallant-yard, from which point I searched the sea ahead ; but the moonlight flung a haze that confused its own brilliance ; and though a great space of water was lighted up, it was like looking at a sheet of dull illuminated silver.

I remained aloft for about ten minutes, gazing intently at the point where we had seen the flashes, and then descended, noticing, as I did so, the green phosphorescent line that was vivid at intervals round the sides of the vessel as she lifted and sank, and the showers of dew occasionally falling from the sails, which were dark with the damp, and doing their work the better for the moisture. I returned aft, and reported that nothing was to be seen.

‘Send a hand on to the topsail-yard,’ exclaimed Shelvocke. ‘Something has occurred in the south’ard, and we must mind what we are about.’

I passed the word along, and a man jumped into the fore - shrouds. Three-quarters of an hour passed, and for the third time I hailed the look-out man to know if he saw anything.

‘No, sir ; there’s nothing in sight,’ was the answer.

‘It was perhaps only sheet-lightning, after all,’ said Shelvocke ; but I thought otherwise.

We paced the deck together for some time, and he then dived below for a glass of grog. The moon, by veering to the westward, had brought her light on the starboard bow ; the sky was so clear, that down upon the very water-line the stars were burning like fire-flies. Mr. Tapping was walking up and down the lee-side of the deck, when he suddenly stopped, and in the haze of light that came from the cabin through the skylight I saw him put his hands to both ears, and stand in an eager listening posture. I watched him. Presently he turned and said :

‘Did you hear anything just now?’

‘Nothing,’ I answered.

‘I fancied I heard a sound like a man’s voice hallooing,’ said he.

I crossed over to his side of the deck, and we both listened. The men forward were as mute as statues; the footfalls of the hands on the look-out were as soft as though they trod in their socks, only now and again the stillness was broken by the creak of a block or the moan of water alongside. The deck, save in the bows of the vessel where the look-out men were moving, was like a painted picture in the moonshine; the motionless shadows of the men like carvings in jet, branched from their feet; aloft, the canvas was sleeping, save when now and again the swell shook a fold of sail against the rigging, and the large yellow stars looked steadily down through the tracery of ropes.

‘I hear nothing,’ said I.

‘It wasn’t my fancy either!’ exclaimed Tapping, looking like an immense bull-frog, with his rounded legs, long arms, and immensely square body in the white, deceptive light. ‘It sounded like a human cry. I’m

not often deceived. I've got ears that will hear through a brick wall, sir.'

Shelvocke came on deck again; and seeing Tapping and me standing in an attitude of listening, he stepped up to us and asked what the matter was. I told him that Tapping believed he had heard a cry.

'What sort of a cry, Mr. Tapping?' inquired Shelvocke.

'A human cry coming out of the sea, sir,' responded Tapping, poetically.

'The plot thickens,' said Shelvocke. 'Damme, the night seems full of mysteries. Heard you anything, Mr. Madison?'

'No, sir; though here have I been listening for some minutes.'

I had scarcely shut my mouth, when Tapping cried out triumphantly, 'There, captain. Mr. Madison, I wasn't mistaken, sir!'

Indeed he was not, for both Shelvocke and I had distinctly heard a thin, reedy cry, more like the imitation by a ventriloquist of a remote voice than a real sound — a faint, unearthly 'Hillo,' coming it was impossible to say from where.

‘There’s some one hailing us, sir,’ shouted a voice forward.

‘Topsail-yard, there!’ called Shelvocke; ‘do you see any sign of a boat about?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Search the sea to leeward. Look brightly around you.’ And after a pause, ‘Well?’

‘I don’t see anything, sir, either to windward or to leeward,’ answered the man.

‘That is extraordinary too!’ exclaimed Shelvocke. ‘Here, Mr. Tapping, take the glass and jump aloft and give me your report.’

As Tapping went up the main-shrouds the hail was repeated. It was a most distressful cry, a little more distinct this time.

‘A sail on the weather-bow!’ shouted the man from the topsail-yard.

‘Ay, ay, there she is, sure enough,’ said Shelvocke in a low voice, extending his hand.

‘I think there are two of them, sir!’ sung out the man.

I looked, and could just distinguish a smudge upon the horizon. That we had not seen it before was owing to the haze of the

moonlight catching the vessel laterally, so as to fling upon her just enough radiance to render her invisible upon the silvered sky in that quarter. But the haze had left her, and veered to the westward, and there was the vessel, a mere smirch indeed, but distinct enough.

I ran below for a second telescope, and handed it to Shelvocke. He took a long look, and exclaimed :

‘ The man is right—there *are* two of them !’ and gave me the glass, the magnifying power of which was considerable ; but so vague and deceptive was the light down in the south-east, where the vessels lay, that the lenses merely resolved the one smirch that was visible to the naked eye into two dark blotches upon the sea, both close together ; but no idea could be formed of the rig or size of the distant craft. While I was working away with the glass, the plaintive shout we had before heard arose clear in the air, and it was no longer possible to mistake either the character or the direction of it.

‘ There is a man overboard somewhere near us !’ sung out one of the men forward.

‘Ay, ay ; keep a sharp look-out for him,’ answered Shelvocke. ‘Mr. Madison, call some hands aft to stand by the peak halliards and braces. Get your gaff-fore-sail brailed up, and swing the fore-yards. Some hands aft here, ready to man and lower away the cutter.’

These orders were repeated by me, and executed quietly and quickly. The helm was put down, and the schooner lay with her head close to the light air, her way arrested by her yards being aback, and a whole crowd of seamen were on her starboard bulwarks looking around upon the surface of the dark water for the man that had hailed us, for we had now brought the moon right astern, and the sea was as black as ebony for half a mile away from the schooner’s side to the north and east, though it changed to a pallid hue from that point, growing a more defined grey, until it became an ash-coloured line against the liquid, dark sky, just as a fog with a light burning in it gradually brightens towards the illuminated centre.

We all stood listening. Over and over again I thought I saw a dark object in the water, but it was only a deception of the

shadows swayed by the undulation of the swell. From time to time exclamations broke from the men : ' There he is ! ' ' Look yonder, mate ! close against that star there ! ' and so forth, but these cries were always followed by a gruff ' No, no ! '

Not having heard his hail for some minutes, most of us believed that the man had sunk, for the last time he had sung out it was certain that he was close enough to enable us to see a boat or a spar, or, in short, anything bigger than a human head, and I had no doubt that he had fallen overboard from one of the vessels away in the gloom, and that his strength had at last failed him, when, to the astonishment of everybody, his lusty shout was heard close aboard.

' Lower away a boat, for God's sake, good people, and pick me up ! You'll be ahead of me in a minute ! '

This appeal, in good English, made some of the men laugh. Tapping sprang into the cutter, and the boat was lowered.

' Pull gently, and mind how you go, ' shouted Shelvocke, ' or you'll run over him. He's not far off ! '

The water flashed up under the oars, and a few strokes carried the boat a dozen fathoms away. I saw Tapping in the stern-sheets, and a hand in the bows, standing up and peering around them. The men pulled another stroke. We then heard voices and a splash, and presently the grind of thole-pins as the boat came towards us.

‘Have you got him?’ cried Shelvocke.

‘Yes, sir,’ answered Tapping.

‘Let him lie where he is. We’ll hoist him in with the boat,’ said Shelvocke, on which the boat came alongside, the crew jumped aboard, and the falls being manned, the cutter soared out of the water as though a giant forked her up through the sea on the end of a pike.

‘Get all plain sail made again, Mr. Tapping,’ said I. ‘Haul round those yards forward.’

I went up to the captain, who waited whilst the stranger in the cutter uncoiled himself, and asked him how we should head.

‘As we go, for the present,’ he answered. ‘Keep your eyes on those vessels yonder.’

We shall be able to see more of them as the moon draws to the westward.'

I ogled the craft again through the glass, but they were nothing more than a couple of blotches, and I rather fancied by the look of them that they were drawing away from us. I put down the glass, and walked aft, where Shelvocke was speaking to the man we had picked up. He was a hulking fellow, with a great cork-jacket under his armpits, which made him look like a turtle mounted on a pair of human shanks. The moon-light sparkled in a pool of water under his feet, and in the drops hanging from his hawk's-bill nose and well-thatched eyebrows. His face in this light was as white as the planks under him, and with the bloated appearance of his body, that reduced his legs in comparison to the thickness of a couple of capstan-bars, and the odd manner in which his arms overhung the top of the cork-jacket, he looked a very alarming object, and a proper sight for a painter in search of a study for a nautical ghost. However, he was perfectly fresh, and gazed around him coolly, and when the steward handed him a rummer of grog

that had been brought by order of the captain, he drank to us with a pleasant nod, and said that he would take another drop when he had dried his clothes.

‘You shall go and dry your clothes at once,’ said Shelvocke, laughing at the fellow’s *sang-froid*; ‘but perhaps you will tell me first what those vessels are yonder?’

‘One’s a French armed lugger, and t’other’s an English cutter of sixty ton,’ answered the man.

‘Do you know how many guns the Frenchman carries?’

‘I don’t, sir; I took no notice of that; but she’s full of men.’

On this Shelvocke told the steward to take the man below, and give him a shift of clothes, then, jumping on a gun-carriage, he took another long squint at the vessels which we had now brought a couple of points on the lee-bow.

‘We’ll have the story presently, Madison,’ said he; ‘but if the flashes we saw came from the guns of those craft, the cutter must have proved an easy capture. I shall attack the lugger—she will serve as practice for the men.’

‘She appears to have the cutter in tow, sir,’ said I, with my eye at the glass, ‘and to judge by the manner in which they are creeping away, they are using their sweeps. However, *we* are not stationary,’ I added, looking down into the water, and observing the long threads breaking away from the schooner’s bows, and rippling out of the darkness into lines of silver as they went astern athwart the moon. Yet the breeze was very faint, and our fore and aft canvas hung up and down without further movement than such as was from time to time communicated by the soft swaying of the schooner over the delicate swell.

Presently Tapping came up to the captain.

‘The steward reports the man ready to see you, sir.’

‘Let him come aft.’

The man, who in his dry attire proved to be a more comely object than I had imagined, approached Shelvocke, who stood with me near the skylight, the haze from which enabled us to have a good sight of the stranger. There was something of the fisherman’s trot in his gait as he came along the deck, and he had stowed away a large junk of

tobacco in his cheek that threw the skin into a knob, behind which fell a short slant of lank black whisker. His eyes were dark, quick, and gleaming, and there was a set, resolute expression in the whole face of the man that persuaded me his bread was not earned in peaceful pursuits.

‘Well, my man, how are you after your bath?’

‘Right enough, sir, thank’ee. A cork jacket ben’t like swimming, though. I reckon I lay in the water more than an hour.’

‘What do you know about those vessels yonder?’

‘Why, you see, I happen to be one of the crew of the cutter. We were heading to fetch the Nor’-sands-head, when the lugger hove in sight, coming right down upon us. I don’t know how it was that none of us took no notice of her until she was a couple of miles off. Any way we thought we’d stop to see what she meant to do, but as she drew near, rattling down upon us under her sweeps as though she carried a stiff breeze astern, we saw that she was a sight too big for us, and crowded with men. So we up helm, and

tried to edge away, but there was no wind, and as we only carried twenty men, our captain sung out that it would be useless to fight him. He hailed us as he came along, and we answered that we were English, on which he let drive three guns, though, after he had fired the first shot, our skipper called out to say he had surrendered. I never waited to see what happened after this, but laying hold of a cork jacket I strapped myself up in it and dropped overboard, preferring to take my chance of drowning to starving in a French prison. That's just the story, gentlemen,' said the fellow, shifting the quid of tobacco from one cheek to the other with his tongue.

'What's the name of the cutter?' asked Shelvocke.

'The *Happy-go-Lucky*, sir.'

'What is she—a trader?'

The man hung in the wind so long that I thought he did not mean to answer the question. At last he exclaimed with great vehemence, 'Capt'n, I'll not tell 'ee a lie. False speaking 'll sarve no end, and this ben't a king's ship neither. The *Happy-go-Lucky's*

in the contraband line, a smuggler they calls her; and so you have it, gentlemen.'

'Pooh! pooh!' said Shelvocke, 'we must recapture the *Happy-go-Lucky* and put you aboard again. That will do. If you want some supper the steward will provide you.'

The man went forward, and Shelvocke gave a low whistle, looking around the silent sea that lay without a tremor under the wide space of moonlight. There was indeed, scarcely any air to be felt now; the stars hung their reflection in the water without a blurr, and the moonshine made the horizon so misty that one would have thought a fog was wreathed around the circle. It was only by straining the sight that I could obtain a glimpse of the vessels ahead.

'If this lasts, Master Frenchman will get away from us,' said Shelvocke. 'But it cannot be helped.'

'Is it worth while to out boats after him, sir?'

'No, the recapture is no great matter, and the job is certainly not worth tiring the men over. Capturing these luggers is about as

profitable as catching flies. They are the proper prey of the cruisers, but the *Tigress* wants larger and better-stocked holds than those boats carry. I suppose,' he continued, laughing, 'the *Happy-go-Lucky* was running for one of the gaps to the westward of the North Foreland. I am told that the cliffs thereabouts are honey-combed by the smugglers. It's reckoned a naughty trade, but upon my soul I can't find it in me to denounce it. The revenue is so completely no man's property that you can't realise the notion of anyone robbing it.'

'Either the horizon gets thicker or Johnny Frog is drawing away fast, sir,' said I; 'I don't see him now.'

'You're looking in the wrong place; there's one of them, at all events, yonder, like a bit of mother-o'-pearl in the moonlight. Aye, and there's the other close to her. I knew their sails would be hove up when the moon got more to the westward.'

He pointed into the south, where, sure enough, I saw the sails of the lugger glimmering like a waning star. The schooner had no steerage-way, and I had been deceived in the

situation of the Frenchman by the *Tigress's* head having fallen off.

Shelvocke went below and I paced the deck alone, whilst Tapping flitted about the gangway like a spectre, snuffling about for the wind, and in various demonstrative ways exhibiting his disgust at the calm. This time last night we were lying snug in dock, with the hum of the distant metropolis in the air; and now here we were with the sea all around us, an enemy in sight, and a certainty of burning powder should a breeze spring up. But these quick transitions are the very spirit of a sailor's life; and of privateering the peculiar fascination lies in the rapidity of the changes of scene it opens up, the suddenness of the dangers and escapes, and the permanent and delightful sense of expectation it raises in a man.

Keeping my eyes pretty constantly fixed on the pale shadow in the south-east, I did at last clearly perceive that it was receding from us fast, and soon after six bells neither I nor Tapping, nor the look-out men could discern the least sign of the vessels. Not more, however, than a quarter of an hour

elapsed after we lost sight of them, when the water in the direction in which they had vanished grew sharp and black under the stars.

‘I think there is some wind coming from yonder,’ I exclaimed to the third mate. ‘If so, we shall be able to hook our Frenchman cleverly, for it is dead on end for him.’

Tapping sprang on to one of the guns.

‘Ay, there’s the wind, sir!’ he shouted. ‘It’s ruling a dark line as it comes; I see it breaking up the starlight, sir!’

It was a strong puff, and it breezed down upon us rapidly. I ordered the square canvas to be furled, and by the time the men were aloft the wind was all about us, and the schooner lying down to it, every sail as flat as a pancake; the water squirting up under the bows and flashing white with threads of green fire alongside and far away astern. At the first coming of the breeze the captain arrived on deck.

‘We have our friend now, I think,’ said he, quietly; ‘and he is welcome to the weather-gage with the wind dead off the French coast. See all clear, Mr. Madison, and have the

lanterns lighted ; but let them be hidden, for Johnny may not have yet smelt us, and we'll have the benefit of his doubts.'

The boatswain's pipe rang clear and shrill upon the wind that was now humming a pretty tune aloft, and skurrying away with a booming note from under the foot of the huge main-sail. The men responded to this their first call to quarters with a smartness that delighted Shelvocke. In a few minutes they were all at stations, tompions out, boxes of canister and grape at the carronades, and a grummet of round-shot at every gun. There was, as might have been expected, some little confusion at first, but a few orders set everything to rights ; and there they stood, ninety of them, ready for whatever might come, whilst the *Tigress* snored along, apparently defying the influence of the light swell, and the water crackling away to leeward like underbrush on fire and blowing up in white smoke, as though the stem of the schooner was a torch and her passage through gunpowder.

A few large clouds came sailing up with this wind, looking like big sheets of wadding

as they neared the moon ; but as she ducked to them and hid her light, the horizon, strangely enough, grew clear : and in one of these intervals, when the cloud-shadows covered the sea and the water-line lay sharp against the stars like a ruling in india-ink, we spied the glimmering vessels, like bits of wool, to windward, about three points on the port-bow.

This was about a quarter of an hour after the breeze had started us. The excitement now began to grow lively. Here was the *Tigress*, jammed close up to the wind, not only overhauling, but weathering upon the two vessels, both of which, we might be sure, were fast boats ; indeed, we had the evidence of the man we had picked up that the smuggler was 'built for walking away, and that there was nothing on the coast that could touch her,' which I thought probable enough, seeing that one of the conditions of success in contraband traffic is speed in sailing ; whilst, on the other hand, the French privateer luggers were famous the world over for the beauty of their bottoms, the strength of their fabrics, and the nimbleness of their heels. So

if nothing more came of this chase, yet as a specimen of what the *Tigress* could do with her main-boom almost amidships and the weather-leech of the flying-jib trembling like the fly of a flag, the adventure was worth the attempt.

Shelvocke and I kept our glasses pointed at the vessels. I expected every moment to see them go about, as the Frenchman stood a poor chance on this board. He was fast opening the cape to the westward of Calais, and once clear of that, we should have the Channel as far as Barfleur clear to run him down in.

‘Can you make out the cutter, Mr. Madison?’ said Shelvocke.

‘Yes, sir; the sternmost one is she,’ I replied, for she looked the smaller of the two.

‘Ay, you are right: but surely the lugger hasn’t got the cutter’s tow-rope aboard still!’

I watched them for some minutes, and then called out:

‘There’s some manœuvring going on between them, sir. They have closed.’

‘Steady!’ shouted Shelvocke to the helmsman. ‘How does she go?’

‘She breaks off, sir.’

‘Good! ’Bout ship, Mr. Madison. Smartly, now! a short board will clap us between Johnny and his home!’

The helm was put down, the canvas thundered as the schooner shot into the wind, and in a minute she was on the starboard tack biting fiercely into the short black running seas with lines of foam trailing down her stem, like the salival froth dropping from the jaws of a bloodhound on the scent, and ratching swiftly to the eastward.

‘Ha!’ I exclaimed, ‘I thought they were up to some game, sir. See, they have set fire to the cutter, and yonder goes the lugger on the same tack as ourselves.’

All that could be distinguished for some minutes was a little spark on the water in the direction where we had last seen the cutter. It grew brighter and larger, and a line of black smoke went blowing low over the tossing and tremulous tract of moonlit sea. In a quarter of an hour the little vessel was blazing freely, casting a small circumference

of red light upon the air, and staining the water a blood-red under her hull.

Hearing a commotion among a group of men stationed at one of the guns forward, I called to know what was the matter.

‘Please your honour,’ replied a voice, ‘it’s the smuggling cove cursing the Frenchman for burning his wessel. He says all his clothes and wallybles is aboard, and two-an’-forty pound in money.’

I caught a glimpse of the poor fellow shaking his long arm over the bulwark and quivering about on his legs, but took no further notice. Meanwhile the lugger was stretching to windward, apparently sailing very fast, though with every foot of the road we measured we drew nearer to her. Indeed, now that we had a fast chase on the weather-bow, we could estimate the *Tigress’s* powers of weathering accurately. With spars erect, she walked to windward as though she were being warped that way. I had expected much of her, but not so much as she was giving us. Only a sailor can sympathise with the strong feeling of delight and pride that fired me when, looking forward, I felt the

wind blowing through my teeth as though it rattled clean over the bowsprit, and then glancing astern, I marked the schooner's wake running away into the pale haze of moonlight as straight as a mill-race speeds from the foaming wheel. By the lugger's having set fire to the cutter, it was plain that she had taken us for an enemy, and that, true to the Frenchman's marine policy, her business was to escape. So far as the wind was concerned, she was in as bad a plight as she could well suffer from, if she was afraid of us and wanted the shelter of her own coast, for the wind was blowing dead along the course she would have liked to make.

The clouds were now tumbling up out of the sea, and slanting athwart the stars pretty thickly, and the water was full of shadows, amid which the moonshine fell down in lines like slender cascades of molten silver, touching the black troubled surface here and there with points of brilliance as sparkling as the flash of diamonds, while the breaking waves glittered like the star-dust in the sky, as their foam crossed the path of these beams; but down in the west the smuggler-cutter was

making a great blaze, and resembled a solid ball of fire on the tumbling surges. Fore and aft there was a grim silence in the schooner, nothing to be heard but the swarming of the passing water and the confused harping of the wind among the iron-stiff weather standing-rigging.

A long twenty minutes went by, at the end of which time the lugger loomed large, not above a point on the weather-bow.

‘Round she goes again, sir!’ I shouted out, seeing the shadow of the sails of the Frenchman fine as he slued upon his heels.

‘Ready about ship!’ sung out Shelvocke, in a voice that seemed to ring across the sea. ‘Stand by to fire the bow-chaser as she goes round.’

There was a short pause as the helm was jammed over to leeward, and then, whilst the canvas rattled overhead as though, like an angry dog, the wind had seized the sails in its teeth and was furiously shaking them, and whilst the schooner chopped up and down upon the rising seas, which poured in foam against her bows; and whilst every block rattled like a gigantic dice-box to the jerking

of the swinging booms and sheets, a broad glare of light flashed upon the darkness, throwing up the figures of the men as they stood around the guns, and every spar and rope and the seams of the deck, like a coloured picture flung for an instant by a powerful red light upon a black cloth, followed by a heavy explosion, while the smoke of the gun whirled away to leeward and gleamed like a torn silk veil as it sped across the sea.

This was the first gun ever fired aboard the *Tigress*, and the report of it was followed by a loud cheer from the men. In a few moments the sails were trimmed, and the schooner was on the port-tack, having doubled upon the chase like a hound upon a fox.

‘They’ll guess our metal by that ball if it dropped anywhere near them,’ said Shelvocke to me; ‘and if so, I hope they’ll give up trying to dodge us.’

‘There she speaks, sir!’ I exclaimed, as a spark winked at the stern of the lugger; but wherever the shot fell, it did not drop within our ken. In a few minutes we yawed, and

gave her another dose from the bow-gun, and then a third, as fast as the men could load. It was too dark and she was too far off for us to see if our shot struck her; but though there could be no doubt that she was within range of the long twenty-four, Shelvocke stopped firing at her after the third discharge. In truth, we were coming up with her fast, and with a little patience we should be able to give her a broadside, for, in petty work of this kind, it is best to save powder until you can make it do what you want.

The lugger had only fired once; she held on in silence and darkness—the foam in a heap to leeward of her, and the stars whirling over her mast-heads as she reeled under the beam swell. By this time we had weathered on her so effectually as to have her dead on a line with our jib-boom.

Suddenly Shelvocke sang out for the star-board guns to give her a broadside.

‘Aim low! I had rather the balls should go under than over her,’ he exclaimed, and, with a motion of the hand, directed the helm to be put down. As the schooner came up

in the wind, the whole five guns were let fly at the lugger ; the blaze of light striking the eye used to the darkness was blinding, and the explosion was like half-a-dozen thunderbolts falling upon the deck. Still the lugger held on without swerving a hair's breadth out of her course, and apparently no more injured than had we blown through a pea-shooter at her.

‘That is what the lawyers call contumacy,’ said Shelvocke, peering at the Frenchman through a glass. ‘It’s quite certain that we haven’t winged her. Can she be within range, Madison ? This light is so confoundedly deceptive, that she might be two or five miles off.’

‘Nearer two than five, sir. I don’t quite see through her moves. It doesn’t look as if she meant to fight us. Perhaps she hopes to run us within sight of one of her cruisers.’

‘Try her with another shot from the fore-castle.’

The order was given, the schooner luffed, and the gun fired. We looked to see the effect of this shot ; but if any mischief had

been done, it was not indicated by the vessel's movements. All this while the wind had been gradually freshening, and was now blowing a strong breeze with a windy-looking sky, and a waning moon in the west that stooped among the clouds like an ill-balanced paper kite. The *Tigress* had now as much canvas on her as she could bear. She lay over until the water was almost level with her lee gun-ports: the sea was a whole smother of foam around her; the spray flashed in smoke over her forecastle, and, when the moonlight streamed upon the canvas, you could have seen the standing-jib dark, half-way up it, with the saturation of the flying water. On the other hand, the Frenchman was as stiff as a church, albeit she carried an enormous press of canvas proportionally out and away greater than we were pelting under.

I was mentally reckoning how long it would take us to get alongside of her, when, to the great astonishment of everybody who was watching, she put her helm up and went swirling away to leeward, dead before the wind, with her lugs boomed out on either side.

Our puzzlement was supreme. It seemed as mad a thing as the Frenchman could be guilty of. He was not only running away from his own coast, but he was bringing the southern limb of the Goodwin Sands dead under his stem; and unless he presently hauled his wind so as to make a more westerly course, he must inevitably run ashore. However, one must fain go where the devil drives. The helm of the schooner was put up, the sheets eased off, and hands sent aloft to loose the square canvas.

Blowing now as it was right over our stern, the wind appeared to have calmed amazingly; but it soon grew apparent that in scudding the lugger was more than our match. Half our sails were becalmed, the gaff fore-sail useless, and even the main-sail gave but little help; whereas the Frenchman, by booming out his lugs, made every cloth serviceable, and we saw him skimming away in the gloom ahead of us like a huge sea-bird swept over the surges by its expanded wings. Still, he had hooked himself dead under our lee, with our broadside to windward, and the Goodwin Sands to leeward of him. In this

posture it was impossible for him to escape us, and so none of us took it much to heart that he improved his distance, or that the *Tigress* lagged a little, seeing the schooner never yet was built that proved herself a fast ship with the wind dead astern of her.

We bowled along in this way, keeping a bright look-out all around us, for this was a wind to give activity to the enemy's cruisers, and any moment might show us the canvas of a big ship. Eight bells, midnight, were struck, and as the last bell was echoing, I dropped the glass I was holding to my eye as I hung over the starboard bulwarks to get a clear view of the lugger that was glimmering upon the darkness a long way ahead, with the reddish moon shining close down upon the sea to the right of her, and said to Shelvocke that the chase seemed to be growing smaller and smaller; that not long ago I could distinctly make out her black hull, but that it was now indistinguishable.

'Surely,' said I, 'she can't be forging ahead so fast as all that, sir.'

He took the glass from me, and had a long squint at her.

‘Why, as you say, Mr. Madison, she does appear to have grown remarkably small on a sudden. I don’t see anything of her hull at all now. And has she any notion where she’s bound to, I wonder?’ He paused and counted upon his fingers. ‘Send a hand on to the top-gallant-yard,’ he exclaimed. ‘The sands can’t be more than a couple of miles distant by the look of that light down there. Bid him keep a sharp look-out for breakers. We must mind that that fellow does not lead us into a mess.’

A man went aloft, and I waited to hear if he had anything to report, but no hail came from him. I walked aft to look at the compass, and was standing there with my eyes fixed on the card, and feeling rather fretful over this prolonged chase, and thinking of the small amount of glory and still smaller amount of profit we, as privateersmen, should get out of the capture of this lugger, and doubting whether we had not done better to jog quietly down Channel, reserving our powder and our heels for a wholesome cargo and daylight, instead of dodging about after a nimble and subtle chase under the perplex-

ing moonlight, when Peacock sung out in his soft flute-like voice from the waist :

‘ They’re burning a blue light aboard the Frenchman, sir !’

I sprang to the side to look, and there sure enough was the lugger illuminated by the blue fire, and looking as though she had been revealed by a flash of lightning, the outline of her sails clearly marked, and the whole square form of her pulsating in the fluctuating light, like the glow of phosphorus rubbed on the wall of a dark chamber ; while at quick intervals she fired guns, sometimes two at a time, the white flames, as they spurted from her sides, contrasting with really grand effect with the ghastly radiance of the blue fire and the black surface of the water and the masses of clouds pouring over the now moonless sky.

‘ Those are clearly distress-signals !’ exclaimed Shelvocke, who stood close beside me. ‘ Surely she cannot have taken the ground. Hail the top-gallant-yard, and see if the look-out man makes broken water in the neighbourhood of the lugger.’

But the answer was that the sea looked clear enough all that way.

‘The lugger has hauled the wind, sir!’ shouted Chestree, with his eye to the glass. ‘She is standing to the norrard—no! she is slueing right up into the wind!’

She was now firing to right and left, as though she were pouring broadsides into an enemy on either side of her.

‘Get the square canvas clewed-up, Mr. Madison—brail up the fore-sail—shorten sail fore and aft, and let her drive down easily. I must see where we are;’ and whilst Shelvocke dived below to have a look at the chart, I half stripped the schooner of her canvas and set the lead going. The soundings gave us eighteen and twenty fathoms of water; besides, the tumble of the sands was not yet in sight, and all hereabouts was a fair-way channel, so we might be sure the lugger was not ashore. Was there anything wrong aboard of her? or were her distress signals merely meant as a ruse to bring us alongside, unsuspecting of the reception she would give us?

Suddenly her blue lights went out and she ceased firing. At this moment Shelvocke came on deck.

‘The chart gives six and seven fathoms almost alongside the sands,’ said he. ‘Where is the lugger?’

‘Yonder,’ I answered, indicating the spot where I had seen her a minute before.

He looked, and then asked me for the glass. He looked again.

‘I don’t see her,’ said he. ‘Try you.’

I levelled the glass, but there were no signs of the lugger where I expected to find her.

‘How’s her head?’ I called out, thinking that the wind had veered, and brought the chase into other bearings.

‘West by north, sir,’ came the answer from the helm, and this was the course we had been steering since the lugger ran off before the wind.

‘Very odd,’ said I, sweeping the sea to right and left of the schooner’s bows. ‘I can see nothing of her. Forward there! can you make out the chase?’

‘No, sir; she’s gone down, I think,’ was the reply after a lengthy pause.

‘Then some of our shot must have told,’ exclaimed Shelvocke. ‘They did not burn

their blue light and fire their guns for nothing. No doubt they took the crew of the cutter aboard before setting fire to her. For God's sake, go forward, Mr. Madison!' he added, apparently greatly agitated, 'and look about you for any of her people in the water.'

I made my way along the main deck that was thronged with the men still at quarters, and reached the forecastle. The sea, away on the port-bow, was a coal-black line against the sky that was yet pallid with the reflection of the moon, though she had been sunk below the horizon some time, and all to the north the stars were burning brilliantly enough to define any shadow leaning against them. Had the lugger been afloat I must certainly have seen her.

'My lads,' I exclaimed to the men on the look-out, 'there can be no doubt the Frenchman has foundered. She had some of our countrymen aboard. Keep your eyes upon the sea and your ears open, for we are close to the spot where she disappeared.'

We hung over the bows, gazing earnestly at the water, that was streaked with the foam of breaking surges, and straining our ears for

a human cry. The seas, however, were so short and confused, and the showering of the spray so heavy as it was blown off the heads of the waves, that the strongest swimmer battling amongst them would have been speedily overcome. We had drifted, according to my calculations, about a quarter of a mile beyond the spot where the Frenchman had foundered, when the man on the top-gallant-yard reported breakers ahead on the starboard bow. As these would be the Goodwin Sands, the helm was put over and the schooner hove to, and lanterns slung over her sides, and in this manner we lay for half-an-hour, every soul aboard of us eagerly searching the surrounding water.

But it was all to no purpose. Our shot had evidently knocked a hole in the lugger that let in water more quickly than her crew could pump it out. She had sunk, and not a vestige of her nor her people was to be seen, though ninety pairs of eyes hung over the bulwarks of the *Tigress*, and the lanterns flung a lustre that made the surface of the water clear for a dozen fathoms away.

I went aft and reported to the captain that

none of the crew of the lugger was to be seen.

‘It’s a bad job,’ he exclaimed. ‘Those luggers are usually as full of men as a hive is of bees, and I should be sorry to guess how many human souls have gone to their account this night. Worst of all, they had the crew of the cutter aboard, and we have destroyed our own countrymen. Yet it could not be helped! so let the hands trim sail now, Mr. Madison, and send the port watch below. The first exploit of the *Tigress* has not been a brilliant one, but it has proved abominably murderous.’

And more affected than I should have believed possible in a man of his resolution and experience, he quitted the deck.



CHAPTER IV.

THE ACTION WITH THE CORVETTE.



HE watch having been called, I went below tired out, and throwing myself into my bunk, fell into a sound sleep in a few minutes. I was aroused at four o'clock, and went on deck; and found the dawn bright in the east, and the schooner, under easy canvas, hugging the wind and heading west-south-west. Indeed, the wind had chopped around, and was blowing off the English coast, the nearest point of which was Dungeness, though not only was there no land in view, but the weather was so thick that the horizon lay at a distance of not more than two miles around us.

I had hoped that when the morning broke the haze would lift; but when the sun rose

and hung over the sea-line like the bottom of a newly-scoured copper kettle, the fog came down as thick as a feather-bed, and blew in steam across the deck. It was all a blank to within three ships' lengths ahead of us. The green seas came curling and foaming out of the fog to windward, but you could not see one inch beyond the point at which their forms grew defined, and they went combing in curves as polished as oil to leeward, vanishing instantly when they came in contact with the fog-curtain.

The breeze was warm, but the damp made it uncomfortable. The decks were so slippery that it was not easy to keep one's footing. The moisture fell in showers from the rigging, and drops of water formed at the brim of my hat as fast as I could shake them off.

At four bells the watch turned out to wash down. There were so many men to perform this job that it was soon over, and the decks being cleared up and the rigging coiled down, the schooner took a more comfortable air; but the fog remained unpleasantly dense, and sometimes settled down so thick, that the inner jib was not to be seen from the binnacle.

Fortunately we had plenty of sea-room, for the French coast that edged away to the southward gave us a broad stretch of water to leeward, we were clear of the Ridge, and had good soundings for leagues.

But fogs of this nature were tolerably fruitful of disagreeable surprises ; at any moment an enemy's hooker might ooze out of the thickness and be aboard of us. I therefore took care to see everything clear, and stationed some experienced hands as look-out men, keeping my own ' weather eye lifting,' as we say at sea, and enjoining Tapping to follow my example. Indeed, the man we had picked up on the previous night had told Shelvocke that his cutter had been chased during the afternoon by a large French corvette, who, finding that she could not over-haul the little smuggling craft in the light wind then prevailing, put her helm up, and apparently returned to her cruising-ground, which the man believed to be between Calais and Lornel Point. We had no particular wish to come across this Frenchman, who was described as mounting very heavy batteries and a great deal too big for us to handle ;

but if our smuggler was right, she was undoubtedly somewhere in the neighbourhood, and it would be no great joke for the fog suddenly to clear and expose the beauty lying close enough to deliver a broadside before we could give the schooner canvas enough to get away.

Shortly before eight bells Shelvocke came on deck, and seeing how matters stood, and that the breeze was dropping, the order was passed along for the men to keep silence, also for no bells to be struck, and for the leadsman to speak his report in a low tone to a hand stationed by his side for the purpose of bringing his messages aft to the officer in charge. In addition to this, the fore-sail was securely brailed up and the stay-sail and inner-jib hauled down to silence their flapping; and the schooner, under her main-sail and standing-jib, glided slowly up and down over the breathing swell, as silent as a dead-house, and amid a fog as impenetrable as a blanket.

At eight o'clock I went below to breakfast, the *Tigress* being in charge of Tapping.

I have a lively recollection of our mess-

table aboard this privateer. Shelvocke was a *bon vivant*; he had a liberal owner in Hannay; moreover his experience in victualling vessels for rich East India passengers was large, so that few men knew better how to furnish a table than he. We sat down to a breakfast fit to place before a prince.

‘And if there is anything wanting,’ said Shelvocke, with his fine smile, ‘Monsieur Crapeau shall supply it. He is a distinguished cook, and understands the secrets of digestion. And why should not we be well served, Madison? As well feed the inmate of a palace on hard salt junk and give majesty to drink of rancid water, as ill-provision the commander and officers of such a glorious little hooker as the *Tigress*.’

‘These be noble sentiments, captain,’ said I.

‘Yet historians say that the reason why the ancient Romans were licked by the northern savages was because they were too fond of roast peacock and the juice of the vine,’ observed Chestree.

‘True, Mr. Chestree; but we are not ancient Romans, sir,’ replied Shelvocke,

apparently surprised that a man like Chestree should know anything about the ancient Romans, 'nor have we savages to fight with. Mr. Madison, there is no blunder more deplorably stupid than the notion that well-fed—mind, I don't say over-fed—men won't do their work properly. Yet men of the type of the late Lord Howe—buckramed Britons with a yard of marline-spike down their backs—will tell you that good officers are only to be got by rearing young fellows on coarse food. I remember the first lieutenant of the *Latona*—that was one of the Channel fleet under Howe in the action of the first of June—telling me that the old admiral was always worrying the people about him with his opinions on eating, and that he would say that were he to found a state and organise a fleet, one of his articles should provide that no officer of what rank soever should consume better food than the cube of salt horse and the occasional dram of rum which are supposed to form fo'ksle provender at sea. Yet old Howe was never tired of stuffing himself with roast pig, and I have heard that he would swill port wine until the Dutch spirit he got from his mother

was all on fire, and then he would talk of Anson, whom I believe he sailed with when a youth, as a person whose memory deserved his patronage.'

'But surely Howe was a great admiral, sir?' said I.

'A great *what*!' shouted Shelvocke. 'Why, it was the king who made him a man. What had Howe, down to '94, to do with his own advancement? If he only took a trip as far as the Soundings his Majesty sent him a letter, told him he was a fine fellow, and the glory of his country, and begged his respects to madam and the little Howes. If it hadn't been for Jervis, Howe, in my opinion, never would have beat the French in '94. The honour done that man—merely because his mother was the daughter of some old Hanoverian baron who had been master of the horse to George I.—will be thought one of the most sickening things in history when the magnifying glass of prejudice is crushed under the heel of time, when the dwarf is dismounted from the shoulders of that short-lived giant called Faction.'

I could not help smiling at Shelvocke's warmth, for Howe had been dead thirteen years, and St. Vincent and Nelson had so eclipsed his achievements that his name was seldom upon the public tongue. But I afterwards learnt that Howe was one of Shelvocke's cherished aversions, and that nothing fired him more quickly than to praise the earl as a good seaman.

'This fog is very bothersome,' said I, willing to change a stupid subject, and glancing up at the skylight that lay like squares of smoked glass over the cabin. 'I don't remember anything like this in summer, sir.'

'It is rather a nuisance for us privateersmen that our ships of war should be blockading the French ports all round,' exclaimed Shelvocke, lying back in his chair with a thoughtful frown. 'Our cruisers whiten the offing from Boulogne to La Rochelle, and round to the Mediterranean as high as the Gulf of Lyons. I doubt if we can hope for much beyond recaptures. I am in favour of the high seas, clear of ports and forts and lee shores ; though I am unwilling to leave

the Channel without laying the foundations of a banking account. We are missing booty in my opinion, Madison, by not stretching across the Atlantic and endeavouring to intercept some of the homeward-bound American traders. But Hannay believes in the English Channel, and I suppose I must give his prejudices a chance. Mr. Chestree, step on deck and see how the weather looks.'

The second mate left the cabin, and returned after an absence of a few minutes. 'It's as thick as mud, sir, and there's very little wind, and there's no appearance of it clearing.' He went on deck again, and after Shelvocke and I had hung over the chart a few minutes we followed him.

It was my watch below, but I had no mind to turn in. The fog was irritating and burdensome; I considered it my duty to be on the alert, albeit the schooner was in good trustworthy hands with Chestree on deck; and moreover the smuggler's tale of the big French ship cruising in this neighbourhood gave every man a reason why his eyes and ears should remain open.

Although there was very little wind, the

fog blew athwart the deck in horizontal lines, it was as white as steam, but not the more penetrable for that ; sometimes it would open a little in folds and disclose the water for about a cable's length from the side of the vessel lying as white as though it were full of chalk sediment, and not a blurr upon it, though there was a small ground-swell upon which the schooner rose and sank sluggishly, but quite noiselessly, as everything had been hauled taut aloft and the sheets flattened in to prevent the canvas from shaking. For the most part, however, the fog hung around and over us in a curtain, sometimes so dense that the men forward could not be seen, whilst the masts shot up and disappeared in it as if they had been sawn short off at the point where they vanished.

Seeing the surgeon smoking a pipe just abaft the galley, I went over and joined him. He had served in a man-of-war, and was a rather coarse-looking person, but he was reputed a very skilful hand, and possessed of more humanity than was commonly to be found among the ship-surgeons of that day. I always thought of ' Roderick Random ' when

I looked at him, for he came very near to the marine medicos of that novel, with his red hair, broken nose, and dirty linen. I spoke to him about the illness I had lately recovered from, and we then drifted into other subjects, and I was rather surprised to find how well he talked. He told me that he was master of four languages, and that it was more on account of his fluency in this respect than because of his professional knowledge that Shelvocke had chosen him out of three or four dozens of applicants for the berth, as it was thought that his capacity of pronouncing these languages skilfully enough to deceive the ear of foreigners might prove of use in strategic measures.

‘I think so too,’ said I, ‘and heartily wish I had your gift of tongues, Mr. Corney,’ for that was his name.

‘How it may be with privateering I don’t know,’ said he; ‘but for the British Navy I contend that no captain ought to be allowed to take charge of a ship of war without being able to converse with tolerable fluency in at least two languages—say, French and Spanish. Last year an English ten-gun brig was sur-

prised and fired into at night by a large French vessel, whose first broadside made a perfect shambles of her deck. The Englishman wore, and under cover of the darkness gave his big enemy the slip ; but a few hours later another large Frenchman came down upon him, and ranging alongside, hailed to know who he was. The captain was about to answer, when the second lieutenant sung out in pure Sicilian that they were the brig *Manfredonia*, of and from Palermo, bound to Rio Para, on which the Frenchman braced his yards round, and left them. The captain reprimanded the lieutenant for answering the Frenchman's hail without leave, and in consequence the lieutenant demanded a court-martial on his own conduct : and the captain was obliged to admit in court that had it not been for the prompt answer of the officer that had completely deceived the Frenchman the brig must have been taken, as half his men were killed or wounded.'

'A very good illustration in favour of your argument, Mr. Corney,' said I ; 'and I have no doubt that many a small, disabled English vessel might have given the enemy the slip,

had she been commanded by a linguist like your second lieutenant. But I say, when is this fog going to clear? it is enough to choke a man.'

And truly it was more ponderous at that moment than at any previous time: the helmsman was a mere looming shadow; although there was a brilliant sun shining overhead, it produced no other effect upon the extraordinarily thick mist than to whiten it; the swell was fast subsiding, and the lines of fog, like trailing smoke, were barely driven by the languid draught of air that was moving from the north.

'Hark! what was that?' I exclaimed, holding the cigar I was raising to my mouth poised mid-way, as though I had been changed into stone.

'What did you hear?' whispered Corney, looking first into the fog on the right, and then into the fog on the left of the schooner.

'Hush!' I muttered: 'there is a vessel near us.'

I went away to Shelvocke, who was sitting on a gun-carriage.

‘Did you hear a noise like the creak of a block just this minute, sir?’

‘Like the creak of a block? Where-away?’ he exclaimed, jumping up.

‘I cannot say where the sound came from, sir, but we may hear something more by listening.’

I got on to a gun to give my ear a good hoist above the bulwarks, and hearkened with rapt attention, whilst Shelvocke, with his head inclined, stood like a war-horse with cocked ears, waiting. The men, observing our posture, watched us to know what the matter was. There was a perfect silence throughout the whole length of the vessel that was not a little impressive when one thought of the crowd of living beings that filled her. Now and again the water gurgled alongside, or the rudder faintly jarred, or a timber groaned; but these last sounds were barely audible, whilst aloft the canvas was as quiet as a church-yard.

On a sudden a cock crowed out in the fog.

The noise, as I fancied, came from the starboard quarter, but Shelvocke bent his ears towards the starboard bow. Every man on

deck had heard the crow, and a half-suppressed titter ran along. It was funny enough to hear the bird's voice sounding from the sea and amid the dense fog, but the humour was made somewhat grim by the possibility that an enemy was close to us.

The moment Shelvocke heard the cock, he whispered to me to see all clear and to have the men stationed; but they were strictly ordered not to speak above their breath, and they went to quarters in their bare feet. This was one of the strangest, and certainly one of the most exciting, experiences I had encountered since I had been to sea. Here we were at quarters, and lying all breathless, so to speak, in an impervious fog that hung in dense vaporous masses all around us, in close company with a ship that was not only utterly invisible, but whose very neighbourhood could not be guessed, nor her nationality and character imagined.

Shelvocke stood groping along the fog with his eyes. I went softly from one side of the deck to the other, frequently imagining I saw a dark outline looming amid the vaporous folds. Presently we heard a sound like that

of a coil of rope flung upon deck, and the rattle of shot or a chain.

‘Where does it come from, Mr. Madison, think you?’ whispered Shelvocke. ‘I never knew anything more deceptive.’

‘She should be yonder if she’s anywhere at all,’ I answered, pointing over the starboard quarter.

‘I would to heaven it would clear, that we might obtain but one glimpse of her,’ said he. ‘Were she as big again as we, and an enemy, I’d try my hand on her, and make capital out of this blanket. Why do you stare? Do you see anything?’

As he spoke, another cock-crow rose shrill and clear, and again a soft little titter ran along the decks of the schooner.

‘I think I see a sort of darkness out yonder, sir,’ said I, pointing to the quarter in which all along I believed the vessel lying. ‘Look a little away to the left of the stern of the cutter.’

But as I said this the fog closed all round again as thick as the smoke from the batteries of a ninety, and Shelvocke shook his head.

‘I see nothing,’ he answered, and went to the side and looked over; then returned to

me. 'She has not an inch of way on her!' he exclaimed, and motioned with his hand to the leadsman, who was astride of the bulwarks just abaft the fore-rigging.

The fellow dropped the lead softly. I went to receive his report, and came back to tell Shelvocke the soundings made twenty-two fathoms.

Four bells were struck in the fog. The tone was marvellously clear, and so close as to make me start, and a moment after we heard a man's voice hailing some one aloft or forward on the vessel.

'What lingo was that?' exclaimed Shelvocke, eagerly.

'I only caught two words, "*laissez! laissez!*" which I take to be French for "drop it!"' I answered.

'Hush!' cried Shelvocke; and at that instant another voice called out loudly. This evidently came from aloft; it seemed to be up in the air, over our heads. Corney came creeping along the quarter-deck.

'They're French aboard that vessel,' said he. 'The man who first spoke said: "*Those English are too mean to grease their masts, and here's a fine spar rotting!*"'

Shelvocke smothered a laugh, but looked grave enough a moment after. He made no remark, but walked aft and stood looking over the taffrail. For some minutes we kept staring and listening, and I was beginning to think that it would end in the vessels drifting apart, and in our getting no sight of our neighbour if the fog did not lift before the night came, when all at once the fog thinned right abeam, as though a lane were opened in it by a passage of wind, and disclosed about a quarter of a mile of white water, with just a faint spangle of sunlight touching the further extremity of it. The folds of the fog rolling to the southward, this lane went with them, and when it reached the quarter, there, standing in the clear space of it, and about a pistol-shot away from the *Tigress*, was a large black ship of not less than six hundred tons, lying broadside on to us, with great channels which gave her rigging a tremendously wide spread, and immensely square lower-yards. The fog came down as low as her tops, so that all her upper spars were hidden. She showed five guns for her broadside.

I sprang aft to take her bearings by the

compass, and when I looked again she was gone.

But gone only to the eye, for now that they had seen us the ear could determine their whereabouts with laughable precision. It was evident that our sudden apparition had greatly alarmed her people ; we heard a whole volley of orders thundered out in French ; ropes were let go, blocks squealed, yards were sharply braced around. Indeed, the confusion was as sure a sign as the lingo that she was in French hands.

‘A merchantman, and a fine one!’ exclaimed Shelvocke. ‘Pass the word for Mr. Corney.’

The surgeon was called, and came up from below.

‘Mr. Corney, you speak French I believe in a way to deceive Frenchmen,’ said Shelvocke. ‘Will you please hail that vessel, and get them to tell you what they know of her?’

‘What vessel, captain?’ said Corney, staring into the fog.

‘Why, the vessel you can *hear*, sir!’

‘Ho, the ship ahoy!’ shouted Corney,

funnelling his hands and aiming his voice in the direction of the hullabaloo.

At this hail a silence fell upon the Frenchman, and a voice answered in French.

‘What ship is that?’ cried Corney.

‘Who are you that inquire?’ came back the reply.

‘The French schooner *St. Brieux* from the north, bound to St. Nazaire,’ responded Corney, promptly. ‘And you?’

There was no answer to this; instead, I heard a sound uncommonly like the traversing of carronade-slides, accompanied by more hauling and pulling and boxing about of the yards.

‘Mind!’ I sung out. ‘They are making ready to give us a broadside, sir. They evidently suspect us.’

And sure enough, as I said this, the white mist flashed up all crimson, as though a mine had exploded close aboard, a heavy roar of artillery followed, and the sea was torn up by a shower of grape about twenty feet away from us.

‘Let them have it, men!’ shouted Shelvocke in a voice that must immediately have let the Frenchmen into the secret of the ‘*St.*

Brioux—‘aim as I point, and high, to cripple her for us when the fog lifts. How does she bear, Mr. Madison?’

‘North-east three quarters east, sir.’

He glanced at the compass and indicated the position of the vessel by extending his hand. The guns were canted and fired. In all five pieces were discharged, and to judge by the crashing and splintering of timber and several sharp yells, the grape and round-shot had plumped faithfully home. Another broad-side followed from the Frenchman, and again the iron sleet tore up the water wide of the mark. From the heavy, broad scattering of the missiles it was plain that they were fighting us with carronades, and it seemed by the explosions that the metal was of heavy calibre.

Our men, following the direction indicated by Shelvocke, fired again, and once more we heard the grape rattling and tearing along the invisible deck and the splintering and crashing of yards and masts aloft. If the fog was thick before, there remains no word to express the opacity of it now that the smoke of the cannon hung around us. Although, as I have said, the enemy lay

within pistol-shot, the very flame-spouts of his last broadside had not glanced the least reflection on the solid body of smoke and vapour; the men stationed at our guns could scarcely see one another, and when we fired our third broadside they had nothing but the recollection of the spot indicated by the captain to go by, for they could not see him.

Five times the Frenchman fired at us, and the last time his grape sung close along the *port* side of the schooner, showing they were aware that their shot had taken no effect and that they had shifted their aim. A little more and this broadside would have raked us, for they fired with depressed muzzles, and their vessel was twice as high out of water as ours. As it was, not a single shot touched us; we had taken their bearings, but they had evidently *not taken ours*, and it was by omissions of this kind, apparently so inconsiderable, but in reality of the very first importance, that French naval officers lost most of the vessels entrusted to them by a country whose reverses at sea were only to be equalled by its disasters on land.

We were in the act of giving them a fourth broadside, when they hailed to say they had surrendered. Shelvocke immediately ordered the pinnacle to be lowered and manned with twelve seamen, in charge of Mr. Tapping, with orders to take possession. The boat's crew were armed to the teeth, Shelvocke being apprehensive of treachery; and a small compass being sent down, and the vessel's bearings given, the pinnacle shoved off, and was immediately swallowed up.

We waited anxiously for Tapping's hail to announce his arrival, the men being still at quarters and the guns double-shotted, ready to bestow their terrible dose should the boat's crew meet with any resistance. But we had no fear that the third mate would overshoot his mark, as he had the bearings of the prize; and it was certain, from the result of our broadsides, that the vessel had not drifted half her own length from the spot in which we had sighted her.

We remained waiting some time, I, for one, expecting every moment to hear pistol-shots and the clash of cutlasses, as I thought it extremely probable that the

Frenchman had called for quarter as an excuse to get his boats out and tow away from the place in which we had nailed him, when, to our great relief, we heard a shout from Tapping.

‘Hallo!’ answered Shelvocke.

‘It’s all right, sir. She’s a splendid ship. We’ve got the Frenchmen under hatches, and liberated the prisoners.’

‘What’s the name of the vessel?’

‘The *Hanover*, bound from London to Jamaica. She was captured this morning at three o’clock by a French privateer, and has a prize-crew of fifteen men, who were taking her to Havre. There are forty of her crew and the master aboard.’

‘Is she much damaged?’

‘Her foretop-mast is in halves, sir, and the royal mast-head rests on the forecastle. Her lower standing rigging is a good deal cut up, but I can’t see anything above her tops. She has three men killed and one slightly wounded.’

‘Very well, Mr. Tapping; whilst this fog holds, I shall fire a musket from time to time, which you will please answer. Let

the liberated men turn to, and refit as well as they can.'

This was the only instance that I can remember of a ship having been fought and taken in a fog. A fog is not like the blackness of night. A night must be supernaturally black indeed to prevent a man from obtaining some idea of an enemy's size and even his postures. The very guns he discharges reveal him ; or there is a phosphorescent sparkle in the water to tell you where he lurks ; or he makes a deeper shadow against the sky than the sky elsewhere holds. But a fog is like blinding a man. You hear a noise, but you cannot tell where it comes from. The flashes of the guns are invisible ; and when you think you have the enemy under your muzzles, he has drifted athwart your bows or is lying dead on end astern of you.

It was extraordinary to think of our having a big recapture within hail of us, and yet out of sight ; of our having fought a ship of which only a few of us had caught the merest glimpse. The fog remained as thick as a Cape Horn snow-storm until noon, during which

time we kept on discharging muskets at intervals, which were regularly answered ; so that each vessel was very exactly apprised of the other's distance, if not position. Shelvocke was in high spirits, and ordered the steward to serve out an extra dram of rum to the men, who had exhibited a remarkable discipline in the silent and resolute manner in which they had gone to quarters, their stillness as they stood in groups, and in their determined bearing as they waited for the fog to discover their near neighbour, who, for all they then knew, might prove to be French line-of-battle ship.

Scarcely had the sun reached the meridian, when the fog began to thin down in the west. One could see it breaking up into masses like the clouds round the brow of a mountain, with glimpses of the sky shining amid the intervals, and the sparkling of the open waters, whilst, astern of us, it was as thick as cream, and the ship invisible. We were all of us anxious to have a sight of the recapture, and every eye was turned aft as the vapour thinned down upon the ship, revealing first her hull and next her courses,

until presently her main-royal yard oozed out, and then the whole of her lay exposed ; and a fine great ship she looked as she floated on the perfectly calm surface of the blue water about eighty fathoms away on our starboard quarter, with her tall, black sides, and the short muzzles of her guns projecting beyond the ports, and her immensely square yards mirrored with extraordinary precision in the transparent sheet of azure on which she reposed, while her large black shape was thrown into strong relief by the solid snow-white bodies of vapour which were slowly rolling and settling away down in the east.

Tapping had turned up her people to refit during the time they lay in the fog ; they had jury-rigged her forward, though there was enough hoist left in the stump of her fore-topmast to enable a double-reefed sail to be set ; and on the whole, they had made a very respectable figure of her aloft, where most of our shot had flown, and left her in a condition very well fit to sail across the short space of water that lay between us and the English coast.

No sooner had the fog left the two vessels

visible to each other, than the ship's gig was lowered, and three men and a stout old fellow got into her, and shoved off for the *Tigress*. Whilst the boat approached our vessel, I jumped on to the bulwark, and had a long look around the horizon. In the east, and stretching a considerable distance north and south, the vapour still hung in heavy masses upon the water, obscuring all that part of the deep down to within a couple or three miles of us ; but the sea was beautifully blue and bright with the flash of sunlight on it, and for leagues in the west it was clear, and not a sail in sight. The atmosphere was breathless ; the swell had entirely subsided, and the two vessels lay motionless, without so much as a stir of their sails to waft a draught of air along the deck, upon which the sun was beating fiercely, and already softening the pitch between the planks, and distilling the smell of paint from the schooner's side.

The *Hanover's* boat hooked on under the gangway, and the old fellow, who proved to be the skipper, stepped on board. He immediately inquired for Captain Shelvocke, and then ran to him with outstretched hands and

fairly embraced him, thanking him in broken tones for having saved his ship and rescued him and his men from the horrors of a French prison. He was a fine, portly-looking old fellow, and had figged himself out for this visit, being dressed in a blue swallow-tail, with a couple of brass buttons nearly as big as saucepan-lids under his shoulder-blades, a fine frill, new silk stockings, big square-toed shoes, heavily-buckled, and a hat like Cobbett's.

He said he had left Gravesend at two o'clock on the preceding afternoon, and had reached the Downs at ten o'clock at night, where, not liking the look of the weather, he had brought up within musket-shot of an English brig of war. At three o'clock in the morning he was in his cabin asleep, when he was aroused by a disturbance on deck, and on running up the companion, he found that his ship had been boarded by three boats full of men belonging to a French privateer that was lying hidden close under the South Foreland. Before the alarm could be raised, the hatches were closed, the cable cut, and the *Hanover* standing away to the southward

under a press of canvas. It appeared, however, that though the English brig had no suspicion of anything being wrong aboard the *Hanover*, she sighted the privateer soon after the Frenchman's boats had returned to her, leaving a prize crew in the *Hanover*, and made all sail in pursuit. The captain added that he had left London bound to Stokes Bay, to make part of a small convoy that was to sail on the following Monday ; he had a crew of forty men, and mounted twelve guns, and certainly hoped, by hugging the English coast, to have dished the French cruisers.

‘But,’ said he, in a passion, ‘the audacity of those privateers is something shocking, sir. Their impudence is only to be equalled by their cowardice. They run like hares at the first alarm, and they rarely try their hand on any game that is likely to cost them so much as a black eye.’

Shelvocke invited him below, but they had hardly reached the bottom of the companion steps when the quarter-deck was hailed by a fellow on the top-sailyard.

‘There’s a sail on the port quarter, sir, about a couple of points abaft the beam.’

I looked, and sure enough there, about four and a half miles away from us, lay a large corvette, which the fog, as it fined away down, had unfolded, just as one lifts a curtain to disclose a scene, with the lustrous water on which she lay becalmed gleaming in her glossy sides, and her courses and top-gallant-sails hanging in the bight of the leech-lines.

I went to the open skylight and gave the news to Shelvocke, who had just seated himself; but the instant he heard me, he jumped out of his chair as though a shell had exploded under him, and ran on deck, followed by the portly skipper of the *Hanover*, who arrived through the companion wheezing like an old hound after a run.

‘One, two, three—*fifteen* gunports of a side, by jingo!’ I exclaimed, working at her with a glass. ‘As stout a twelve hundred ship as was ever launched, sir!’

‘Yes, fifteen gun-ports, and all furnished too,’ said Shelvocke: ‘and if the height of her lower masts and the narrowness of her top-sailyards, and the hollow cut of the foot of her sails don’t speak her a Frenchman, let

me be called a Dutchman. What say you, captain?' and he handed the glass to the *Hanover's* skipper.

The old fellow took a long steady stare, and then letting the glass drop from his eye, said :

'A Frenchman, sir—and a very ugly one, too.'

Shelvocke glanced round the horizon.

'I see no signs of a breeze, Mr. Madison, so let the crew go to dinner. Mr. Peacock, jump aft and hoist French colours. I'll bother that chap. Carry the halliards forward that the bunting may show.'

No sooner was the French flag drooping at our peak than a similar flag was run up to the mizzen-mast-head of the corvette. In a few moments this was hauled down, and a private signal hoisted.

'Dip the flag, Mr. Peacock,' sung out Shelvocke. 'That will perplex them, Mr. Madison. They *may* take us for one of their own privateers becalmed with a prize.'

Our flag was lowered half-way down, and then run up again. After a little they hauled

down the private signal and hoisted the blood-red St. George's cross.

'No, no, my fine fellow, that won't do,' exclaimed Shelvocke, laughing. 'Mr. Peacock, belay the flag-halliards, and let them puzzle for awhile over that guarantee of our honesty. Captain Jenkinson,' addressing the skipper, 'if yonder craft prove to be, as I am cocksure she is, a Frenchman, shall you and I fight her?'

'With pleasure,' answered the hearty old chap, with a sharp gleam in his eye; 'if she'll let us.'

'You say you can muster forty men—you have thirteen of my crew besides, whom I shall leave with you. What are your guns?'

'Eighteen-pound carronades.'

'You have five of a side—any swivels?'

'Two.'

'Why, you have men to fight them and to spare. What is the risk compared to the chance of success?' He took a few short turns, and slapping his leg vehemently, exclaimed: 'We'll have her! we'll have her! Mr. Peacock, jump below and tell the steward

to hurry forward the dinner. Captain Jenkinson, we'll settle our tactics over a piece of English beef.'

Presently the steward came up to say that dinner was on the table, and I remained alone on deck to watch the movements of the corvette. All this time she had kept English colours hoisted, but shortly after Shelvocke had gone below she replaced the English with the French flag, and at the same time sheeted home her top-gallant-sails and set all three royals. I construed this into a make-ready manœuvre, but whether done with the intention of drawing closer or hauling off when the wind came I could not guess. It was quite probable that she was deceived by the hull of our schooner which had the true French lines, and the dogged way in which we kept her country's flag hoisted would also help to give her people confidence in us.

Our men having eaten their dinner, came up in twos and threes, at a time, and hung over the bulwarks watching her. So motionless was the air and so marvellously restful the surface of the water, that the *Hanover*

and the *Tigress* remained almost precisely in the same posture in which the lifting of the fog had disclosed them.

Twenty minutes passed, and I was looking at the corvette through the glass, when I saw them lower a boat, and distinctly perceived the glitter of the uniform of the officer who entered her. I watched to see what this meant, and on observing that the boat was making for us I reported the circumstance to Shelvocke, who immediately came on deck. It was evident from the leisurely manner in which the boat came along that the officer had not been despatched to make a *tête-à-tête* inquiry. Several times the men rested on their oars while the officer stood up and scrutinised us with a glass. Each time he sat down the boat's crew gave way again, as though another few strokes of the oars would give them a better chance of observing us.

I heard our men forward chuckling over this amusingly reluctant approach when the boat was near enough for them to see her. Indeed, it reminded me of some cowardly though savage animal creeping towards one, ready to turn and fly at the first sound. Yet that boat

upon the lustrous blue water and the shape of the heavy corvette beyond made a picture of uncommon beauty. The sea was just broken and blurred under the rise and fall of the oars as though they were dipped into a sheet of quicksilver, and the boat looked like one of those long-legged insects one sees on the surface of stagnant pools on summer evenings as she cautiously advanced with the oars rising and dropping ; while the pale blue sea rose like glass to the black hull of the corvette, and terminated a short distance beyond the ship in a gleaming line that was barely distinguishable from the sky ; for the fog had now melted out of the air, and the horizon was an unbroken circle.

The boat had got to within a mile and a quarter of us, and Shelvocke had sung out to the boatswain to pipe away the cutter's crew ready to chase her ; when, for the tenth time, her men rested on their oars whilst the officer stood up and examined us. But on this occasion he appeared to have discovered as much as he wanted to find out ; for in a moment he flung himself down, the boat's head was pulled round, and off they

went back to their ship as hard as ever they could pelt.

‘Give him a shot from the stern-chaser!’ shouted Shelvocke. ‘Haul down that flag and hoist English colours!’

The gun was pointed and fired, at the instant the English ensign was run up. The roar of the heavy piece of ordnance, amid the dead calm that then prevailed, seemed to shake the schooner down to her keelson. I watched the shot strike the water a long distance astern of the boat and go hopping after her like a pea along a polished table, tarnishing the sea where it struck it as a mirror is blurred by the passage of a damp finger, and flashing up white jets as it ricocheted. The eye lost sight of it after a certain distance, but though it did not hit the boat, it was a well-thrown shot.

‘They have the truth now,’ said Shelvocke, with a glance at our ensign, the nationality of which was clearly displayed by the halliards being taken forwards, so as to let the flag hang down like a table-cloth in a laundress’s drying-ground. ‘Captain Jenkinson, I think you had best get aboard your ship and see

all clear. We shall take advantage of the first slant of air, and I shall not be surprised if the fog be not presently followed by a breeze from the westward.'

The old fellow immediately shook hands with Shelvocke, saying, as he went over the side, that we might count upon his supporting the schooner if the corvette only allowed him to bring his guns within range; and getting into his boat, shoved off, and was presently scrambling up the tall side of the *Hanover*.

'A regular Briton, all of the olden time,' exclaimed Shelvocke, watching him as he gained the side of his ship, 'as full of spunk as a terrier. But Mr. Madison, you had better step below, and get something to eat while there is time.'

I was not sorry for the chance, but did not stay at table above ten minutes. When I came on deck again, I found Shelvocke pacing up and down the quarter-deck with a cigar in his mouth, casting light glances around the sea from time to time, and constantly humming a soft tune.

The men hung about in the shadows of the sails and the bulwarks, with their breasts bare

and their faces crimson. It was, indeed, as hot as ever I remember experiencing in any part of the world. If I stood still a moment I could feel the heat on the surface of the deck through the soles of my boots. A faint haze had gathered over the horizon, and hung in some places in greyish streaks like smoke, whilst here and there it resembled the outline of a coast. For all that, the air was amazingly transparent, and such was the refractive power of the light that the sea beyond the normal line of it was lifted up so as to form a mirage, which caused the corvette to appear close to us, though, as I have said, she was between four and five miles distant.

‘What is the time, Mr. Madison?’ asked Shelvocke.

‘Hard upon two bells, sir.’

‘The wind is a long while coming, but after such an extraordinary fog as the one that has just left us, we must be prepared for wonders. I doubt if that fellow will show fight. I have arranged with Jenkinson to let him go if the wind comes northerly—that is, if he means to go—as I don’t want to find

France a lee-shore with a half-masted ship like the *Hanover* in company. On the other hand, if the wind comes south, or east, or west, we'll fight him. My tactics will be to dismast him, for really I believe the *Tigress* will be able to post herself where she pleases, providing the right kind of wind blows. Anyway we must cripple him aloft if possible, so as to give the *Hanover* a chance of pounding him on one side, while we hammer him on the other.'

'He won't come up to the scratch, sir. He will have guessed that the *Hanover* is a recapture, and depend upon it he knows that M. le Ministre will forgive his anxiety to preserve the corvette to the grand nation, when he reports that he was opposed to two British vessels, one of them of *trois mâts*, both heavily armed, and, of course, chokeful of men.'

'Ay, especially the one of three masts,' said Shelvocke with a laugh. 'Well, Mr. Madison, it may prove as you say. Our business, I will not call it our duty, is to capture her if we can ; and, as I have said, if the wind blows from any quarter but the north, I

will chase her if she runs, and if she offers fight will engage her, let the wind blow how it will.'

He then repeated his conversation with Jenkinson, and explained the tactics agreed upon, should the vessels come into action. I was in the middle of an anecdote of an American privateer that had very cleverly fought an English sloop-ship by means of certain manœuvres which the reader would hardly thank me for particularising, when, my eye being on the corvette, I noticed that she had set her fore-sail. I immediately called Shelvocke's attention to this, and suspecting the reason, I took the glass and sprang into the main rigging to make sure of it.

One look satisfied me ; the water was dark all away astern of the Frenchman, and a fresh breeze was coming down dead over her taffrail as she lay with her head to the northward and westward. On my reporting this, Shelvocke immediately passed the word along for the hands to be stationed and everything seen clear. Boarding nettings were triced up, the guns double-shotted, the primings care-

fully looked to, and all the usual warlike preparations made.

Owing to the sea being cast up by the refractive light behind the corvette, we could see the dark blue line of the wind ruffling the water astern of her when she herself lay motionless upon the placid, lustrous-grey surface. We watched her anxiously. Would she keep her yards square and come down with the breeze upon us, or brace up and haul away on a bowline? In a few minutes the flag she carried at the mizzenmast-head and the long pennant at the main blew out, her sails rounded, throwing off the shadows which filled them whilst they hung slack from the yards, like the moon dipping clear of a cloud, and resembling ivory hemispheres as they soared brilliant in the sunshine, one on top of the other. Indeed it was a beautiful sight to see her canvas fill, and the water all around a rich quivering blue, and the passage of the wind along the sea marked by a line as clear as the horizon against the sky.

‘She steers as straight as a hair for us,’ said Shelvocke, coolly; ‘and has more pluck than you think, Madison. She is a big pill

for our small throats, but we'll try to swallow her all the same.'

'Look, sir!' I exclaimed, almost bursting into a laugh, so strong upon me was the excitement of the moment.

As I spoke the corvette's jib-boom made a slow, majestic sweep, her yards were braced round, her main-tack was boarded, and, giving us a whole-length view of herself, there was our heavy friend ratching dead to windward, and going away to the southward under every stitch of canvas she could carry. A regular groan broke from our crew, and a loud, derisive shout came ringing across the water from the *Hanover*.

'No matter, my lads!' exclaimed Shelvocke. 'She'll have to go pretty nearly as far as Cherbourg to fetch her native shores if this wind holds, and I have no doubt, men, she'll reach the nearest port she can come at safe enough—if we let her.'

'We never will let her, sir!'—'Give the *Tigress* the scent, and she'll know the road!'—'More prize-money for the gals!'—'Hurrah, boys, here comes the breeze.' And plump it fell upon us whilst these cries

broke from the crew. The schooner's helm was put hard down, her after-sails rattled her round and like the wild and desperate beast whose name she bore, she seemed to give a long plunge, settle herself for a bounding run, and in a minute was tearing after the Frenchman.

It was a fine fresh breeze that blew now, with a promise of more weight in it presently. The sea was all of a dance at once, and blobs of foam like chips of white pine blew about the merry, streaming waters. The *Hanover* took the wind, and rounded to it handsomely, and there she was astern of us, with a double-reefed fore-top-sail, and stay-sail, and jib set flying forward, and a tower of canvas behind. I laughed when I looked at her, but I caught Shelvocke watching her with an expression of great anxiety. A very few minutes proved that the *Tigress* would leave the *Hanover* hull down long before the corvette fell within range of our guns. Her round bows made a great hullabaloo in the water, and she splashed and wobbled like a negro bathing; but her rate of progress was very slow. Although her bowlines had been triced out to a regular sailors' song, she appeared to be going free

in comparison with the close-sailing of the schooner; and although she had started somewhat to windward of us, already in this short distance of time, she was well on our lee quarter. A dull sailer she undoubtedly was at the best, but with her fore-top-mast in halves, she was simply nowhere at all; and it was immediately apparent, now that the corvette had hauled her wind, that the *Hanover* could not possibly take part in the tactics which had been concerted between her captain and Shelvocke.

For the first and only time that I can remember, Shelvocke appeared irresolute.

‘Jenkinson ought to have told me she was a tub,’ he exclaimed angrily. ‘I knew by her bows that she wasn’t a clipper; but, confound the man! who would have guessed his hooker couldn’t sail at all? Shall I order Tapping to carry the old sugar-box home or let him take his chance by following us?’

‘You’ll find the Frenchman will shorten sail and bear down upon us when he sees the *Hanover* going. Don’t fancy I want to back out of the job, captain, if I ask whether you

don't think a thirty-eight gun ship, as I take that corvette to be, is not a trifle too big for us ?'

'No!' he answered passionately; 'and were she twice as big, I would chase and fight her after my speech to the men. That's not the question. What am I to do with that old tea-waggon on our quarter yonder ?'

'Send her adrift, sir. She'll be safer out of the road, and she is certainly of no use to us.'

He immediately ordered Chestree to signal to the *Hanover* to make the best of her way at once to England. Old Jenkinson seemed annoyed by this order, to judge at least by his tardiness in executing it. I suggested to Shelvocke that, as he had practically reinstated Jenkinson in his old command, Tapping might have been prohibited from carrying out the injunction made by signal.

'More than likely,' exclaimed Shelvocke, still in a passion. 'But I'll soon show Jenkinson who's master. Molloy, throw a shot across the *Hanover's* forefoot.'

The man who was stationed at the aftermost gun sighted the piece, and fired. The

hint sufficed ; for when the smoke cleared away, we saw the *Hanover* in the act of going off before the wind, and in a few minutes there were hands aloft, rigging out the studding-sail booms.

Shelvocke paced the quarter-deck quickly, sometimes glancing at the Frenchman whom we were slowly weathering, though he was spanking along at a sharp pace, sometimes looking after the *Hanover*, whose stern was now at us, and who with her studding-sails appeared a whole hill of canvas on the smooth water.

Chestree came up and asked me if Captain Shelvocke meant to engage the corvette.

‘It looks uncommonly like it,’ I answered, ‘considering that we are not sailing her for a wager.’

‘She’s a big ship, Mr. Madison,’ said he, looking at her with his head askew, as though he were wall-eyed.

‘Yes ; a trifle bigger than we are, Mr. Chestree.’

‘Pray the Lord her batteries prove caronades, Mr. Madison. How many men might she carry now, think you, sir ?’

‘Why, vessels of her class are usually crowded; and I think we may safely calculate on being opposed by three hundred and fifty men.’

‘And Tapping away with twelve of our crew!’ said he, in a voice so like a groan, that Shelvocke, who was pacing the other side of the deck, stared hard at him.

‘No doubt the task before us would be easier if she were smaller or we were bigger,’ I observed; ‘but then half the fun of fighting her would be lost.’

And so saying, though not in heart one jot more comfortable than my friend Cheshire, I went over to the weather-side to watch the enemy. She bore about two points before the beam: and in consequence of the superiority of a fore-and-aft over a square-rigged vessel in hugging the wind, we were lying up well for her, and every minute decreasing the space between us. She was not more than three and a half miles away; and even at that distance was as beautiful a sight as any man could wish to look on. Viewed through the glass, her people could

be clearly distinguished upon her snow-white decks, which the pressure of the wind on her canvas inclined towards us sufficiently to enable me to see the breeches of her port-tier of main-deck guns. It is likely that she took us to be a larger vessel than we were; for our far-reaching mast-heads and prodigious spread of cloths—the end of our main-boom when amidships seemed to go a whole ship's length over the taffrail!—made us an imposing object; but whether the sight of the retreating *Hanover* gave her courage, or whether she found we were fore-reaching and weathering on her too fast to give her a chance, or whether she grew ashamed of running away from a vessel that might have made a long-boat for her, she presently clewed up her royals and fore and mizzen top-gallant sails, and hauled up her courses, and, putting her helm to port, ran down to meet us.

I had been expecting this every minute; but the moment she altered her course, Shelvocke gave the order to put the schooner about. The *Tigress* having brave way on her, ran into the wind to the tune of the boat-

swain's pipe, and before a man could have counted fifty, she was standing to the eastward, with sails as flat as boards, and the men, as quiet as figure-heads, massed along the decks.

This manœuvre seemed to capsize Johnny's theories. I suppose he could not guess what we would be at. He stood on for a few minutes, during which time Shelvocke watched him with gleaming eyes and as mocking a smile as ever I saw on a man's face ; then he put his helm down.

Probably few landsmen, how ignorant soever of the sea, but know that a square-rigged vessel does not go round on her heels in stays like a schooner. It seemed an age, in comparison with the nimbleness of the *Tigress*, before the corvette swung her fore-yards ; and when at last she was braced up on the starboard tack, we had made half a mile of weathering, and were well on her lee-quarter. She had hardly got her yards trimmed when she let fly two guns at us, probably to test the range ; but, whatever might have been the calibre of the pieces,

nothing, so far as we were concerned, came of the experiment but the veil of cobweb-coloured smoke that puffed up over her stern and blew down towards us along the sea.

We watched her setting the flying-kites she had clewed up, and when she had boarded her tacks and made herself comfortable, once more Shelvocke shouted out : ‘ Hands about ship ! ’ and amid the half-suppressed grins of the men, who heartily enjoyed the manner in which the captain was bothering the Frenchman, and who believed that behind this dodging lay a bold and clever scheme, the helm was again put down, and the *Tigress* headed on her former course.

It was [the right kind of breeze for the schooner,] fresh without much weight, and the sea smooth, and she went along like a sledge over a level plain of ice. This time Johnny was more alert. While our own ropes were coiling down, his sails were shaking, and as he gave us his stern, he favoured us with another gun. The ball dropped a long way short, though I saw the flash of the foam where it fell.

‘Look! look!’ shouted Shelvocke, suddenly. ‘She’s missed stays! By heaven, they’ve got her in irons! Put your helm down—flow your head-sheets—quick, men—so! Make ready with your bow gun there, and aim at her spars. Don’t fire before the order’s given!’

The corvette was indeed in one of those unfortunate predicaments which, in ninety-nine cases in a hundred, are the result of bad seamanship. It happens sometimes, it is true, that, in a cross-sea, and under small canvas, a ship will come up into the wind a short way, and fall off again with her helm hard down; but in smooth water, with a fine breeze blowing, and all plain sail set, missing stays can only be the consequence of culpable ignorance on the part of the captain or officer in charge, or an inattention on the part of the man at the helm serious enough to deserve the penalty of the yard-arm.

There lay the corvette all aback, the utmost confusion prevailing aboard; and we could only hope that the ignorance or neglect that had got her into this trouble would keep her in it until we had found our account. The

Tigress was again on the starboard tack, heading up nobly for the enemy. Shelvocke watched her like a cat. Presently she squared her after-yards, and began to pay off slowly. As her broadside veered round to us, she let fly the whole of her main-deck guns. The iron shower tore up the sea at an equal distance between her and us, and buried itself.

‘Ready there with the forecastle gun!’ shouted Shelvocke. ‘Take good aim — fire!’

The explosion filled the forepart of the schooner with smoke, and for a few moments the corvette was hidden. Shelvocke sprang on to the weather-bulwarks, and craned himself over the side.

‘Load again quickly, and let her have another dose!’ he sung out, whilst I ran aft, ready for the manœuvre I knew he would execute in a moment or two.

On the second shot being fired from our forecastle, the order was given to put the helm down, and as the schooner shot up into the wind, presenting her broadside to the enemy, who was wearing to come up on the port

tack, we gave her five guns. They were discharged with splendid precision. As the white, sulphureous folds were swept off to leeward, I saw the corvette dead abeam of us about a mile to windward, with her mizzen-royal-mast gone, and her main top-sail-yard on the cap, the halliards having been shot away. There were several large shot-holes in her fore-topsail and main-sail, showing the accuracy with which our guns had been aimed.

We were now, however, in a position to receive *her* broadside, and in a moment it came. The whole side of the black hull flashed into a blinding blaze of light, and I held my breath, expecting to hear the crash of spars tumbling about our ears. One or two shrieks from our crew followed the discharge, and I saw a man stationed at one of the amid-ship guns spring a couple of feet in the air, and fall like an overturned statue. But aloft the only injury received was a large gape in the fore-sail and the cutting in halves of some of the running-rigging, the ends of which streamed away like serpents.

For some time the two vessels held on in

grim silence. The corvette hugged the wind to preserve the weather-gage as we did to gain it ; but she was no match for us either in weathering or forereaching. Although they had bent the topsail halliards afresh with great promptitude, yet even the short period during which this sail had been useless had given us a decided advantage. We were approaching each other fast, and why she did not ease her helm and give us another broadside at once I can only account for by believing that she reserved her powder in the hope of being able presently to transmogrify us by a single discharge. Any way, she could judge of our strength accurately enough now, and, despite our sauciness, would reckon upon an easy capture.

‘Luff!’ suddenly shouted Shelvocke. ‘Fire, men, when your broadside bears.’

We spun on our heels, giving the corvette a heavy dose as we rounded, and receiving from her in return a whole storm of canister and round-shot that wounded three of our men, one badly, nipped the foretop-mast just under the royal yard as clean as a handsaw would have done it, filled the fore-sail as full

of holes as a piece of embroidery-work, and knocked the gig into staves, which tumbled astern and went away as though an old cask had gone to pieces.

I noticed the moment we had got the schooner round that the wind had veered to the westward of south, which must have happened whilst we were in stays, so that when the vessel lay close her bowsprit pointed slightly to windward of the corvette's weather-quarter. This shift of wind necessitated a return to our former posture, and the helm was put up to let the *Tigress* wear, as by tack-ing we should have run aboard the Frenchman. His guns had raised such a smoke that it was impossible to know for some minutes what mischief we had done him; it was then seen that his mizzen top-mast had been shot away, his starboard main standing lower rigging was trailing alongside, his jib-boom was gone at the cap, and his jibs, ballooning in the water, held him as though he had been warped to a buoy.

Meanwhile we were edging away from him fast, and crawling to windward, some of the

hands busy in doctoring the running gear and bending a new fore-sail, whilst we kept playing the enemy with round-shot from our long eighteens, which he made ineffectual efforts to return owing to his dismantled condition forward that prevented him from bringing his broadside to bear.

I will not deny that our luck so far had been extraordinarily great. His missing stays had, indeed, permitted us to do almost what we pleased. But, luck or no luck, the manner in which Shelvocke had handled the schooner was beyond praise, and such was the precision with which our men fired that every shot they launched at the clumsily-worked corvette carried death and destruction with it.

The wind had now freshened into a strong working breeze, and the *Tigress* was tearing through the water as though she had had enough of this business and wanted to get home. With our guns trained well **aft** we kept pegging away at the enemy, whose return fire was of the most capricious and wavering kind, whilst her bowsprit was black with men clearing the raffle forward.

At the distance of about a mile away from her we tacked, shortened sail, and there we lay snugly to windward, our people peppering her with the coolness of men practising on a target. The order had been given to aim low so as to hull her and shatter her rudder, and the spray flashed up under the balls that raced along as though shells were exploding under the surface of the water.

She had fallen off with her head to the northward, and they were answering our fire with great persistence with their stern-chasers, the shot of one of which crashed through the bulwark close to where I was standing, and filled the air with a whole shower of splinters, by which one of the best men in our crew lost his right eye. It was difficult to see what they were about ; but a quarter of an hour after we had got the weather-gage of her they rounded their yards, braced up sharp on the starboard tack, and headed to the eastward. She kept her colours flying, and so soon as she presented her broadside she aimed a shower of grape at us which, however, fell short, as in squaring away she

had widened the distance between us to over a mile.

Suddenly some one sung out, 'A sail on the lee quarter!' and looking that way I saw the canvas of what was apparently a large ship, gleaming like satin in the ardent blaze of the afternoon sun. The Frenchman had seen her as well as we, and, being a mile farther that way, could judge better than we what she was like; and his sudden eagerness to crowd away to the eastward looked very much as though he suspected the stranger was an Englishman.

'If we are not sharp,' cried Shelvocke, rapping out an oath, his face dark with perspiration, and standing bare-headed, with his rough hair blowing over his lion-like forehead, 'we shall have burnt our powder merely to make that corvette an easy prize for a king's ship.'

'Unless yonder sail prove a national vessel,' I said.

'We'll risk it!' he shouted. 'Men, double-shot the long gun forward. Aim at her colours when I put the helm up—if you can bring

that flag down she may not want to hoist it again.'

The tiller was put to starboard, and the twenty-four-pounder fired.

'Now let fly your broadside as she comes to,' and crash went the three after-guns. I saw the white splinters glance from her side like bits of silver under the discharge an instant before she delivered another whole broadside at us. This time she had got some of her long guns to bear, and down came our main-sail along with the colours, and a whole shower of blocks and fragments of rope.

A dozen hands sprang aft. The throat and peak halliards were spliced, and with admirable smartness the great sail was hoisted again, along with the red flag streaming at the peak, a sight that raised a hurricane of cheers, in which I found myself joining until I was hoarse.

'Another broadside, my lads, to avenge that affront!' shouted Shelvocke; and again our guns belched forth their lightning and thunder, and the thick pall of smoke swept in an ugly cloud over the radiant blue waters.

'The ship to leeward has hoisted English

colours—she is coming up fast—I can see her courses down to the tacks of them!’ I cried, working away with the glass.

‘We have shot away the Frenchman’s colours!’ sung out Chestree from the waist, where he stood with his face as grimy as a chimney-sweep’s from the sweat and powder that covered it.

‘She has hauled them down, sir!’ cried a dozen voices.

‘Not a bit of it!’ shouted Shelvocke. ‘Let her have another broadside! She’s not to be meat for our masters!’ pointing with a passionate gesture to the ship to leeward, whose presence seemed to make him mad.

Amid a volley of cheers, the guns were again fired. We looked to see the effect. For some minutes the corvette had ceased firing, and heeling over to the breeze, she was stretching along the water with a line of foam along her, against which sparkled her bright copper, though the stately fabric aloft was in sad ruins, her sails full of holes, her mizzen-top-mast gone, her high-pitched bowsprit looking like the stump of an amputated arm, and her colours vanished.

Hardly had the smoke of our last broadside cleared away, when two flags were run up to her main. They got foul when they had mounted a short distance, and were hauled down. In a few moments they were hoisted again, and when they were level with the main-top, they blew out and disclosed the English flag flying over the French colours. We stood looking on in perfect silence until the flags were mast-headed, and then such a roar broke from the men as I believe only British throats know how to deliver. I saw rough fellows stripped naked to the waist *blubber like children* as they shook hands with one another. On the news being taken below, where the surgeon was working like a horse, a man whose knee had been shattered by a grape-shot, compelled the bearers of the news to carry him on deck, where, snatching a cutlass from the hand of one of his mates, he brandished it over his head, and with a half-suffocated cheer for Captain Shelvocke and the *Tigress*, fainted dead away.

‘It was worth the risk, was it not, Madison?’ said Shelvocke, looking with a proud smile at

the corvette, and combing the sweat from his forehead with his hand.

‘It was, sir,’ I answered promptly ; ‘and I cordially congratulate you on a remarkable victory.’

‘Which would have been won by us,’ said he, ‘not so speedily perhaps, but in the end quite as surely, without the presence of that big cruiser.’

Meanwhile we were running down to the Frenchman, who lay with his main-yards aback, a pitiful spectacle indeed, the significance of which was enormously increased by the flags at the mast-head. As we drew near, we saw that her hull was badly knocked about, especially in the after-part, and her bulwarks abaft the mizzen-rigging were full of holes, some of them as cleanly cut as if a chisel had gouged them out. We rounded to about a quarter of a mile to windward of her, and lowered a boat, into which I got with ten men, and a few strokes of the oars took us alongside.

On gaining the deck of the prize, I was received by a man who proved to be the first lieutenant, whose resemblance to Buonaparte

was so extraordinary, that I came to a dead halt when I saw him. His very pose, as he stood to receive me, was that of the First Consul : the head inclined forward, one arm reposing on the breast, and the other hanging by his side.

‘Monsieur,’ said he in French, with much grief not unmingled with dignity in his manner, ‘my captain being dead, it is my melancholy duty to take his place, and to yield possession of the *Diane* to her conquerors. It is the fortune of war, monsieur ;’ and with a low bow, he gave me his sword.

I understood very well what he said, but my stock of French was small, and what I knew I was reluctant to pronounce for fear of being laughed at. I asked him if he spoke English.

‘A leetel,’ said he, with much such a grimace as a man would make who had an unpleasant taste in his mouth.

‘Then, monsieur,’ said I, ‘I should be glad to learn from your lips that your yielding to the privateer schooner *Tigress* was not occasioned by the presence of that ship yonder ;’ and I pointed to the British vessel to

leeward, that had tacked, and was now heading to fetch us by a couple of boards, and that turned out to be a large two-decker.

‘Sare,’ he replied, with a slow smile, ‘ze *Diane* yields to *you*. But,’ with a flourish of his hands, ‘had it not been for zat sheep zaire, ve should have continue ze fight.’

And this was all I could get him to admit.

That the fight would have been protracted had the liner kept her sails out of sight I do not deny, and have always admitted in talking over the engagement ; but that the corvette would *ultimately* have yielded to us I am quite confident ; for having the weather-gage, being almost uninjured aloft, having marvellous sailing qualities, and being armed with guns which could have battered the enemy within a radius of two miles, the *Tigress* might have been backed to have knocked the *Diane* into a sheer hulk in less than another hour.

The survivors of her crew had been got below, and my men stood guard over the hatches ; and, having a clear view of the deck, I beheld as ghastly a sight as the horrors of warfare ever furnished forth. The main-deck was strown with carcasses : the scene re-

mind me of the description of the deck of the *Salvador*, after the action off Cape St. Vincent. In addition to the slaughter caused by our own guns, one of the main-deck carronades had burst, and killed twelve men who were stationed at or near it. It was enough to freeze the marrow in a man's bones to see the shattered human remains, the broad, dark scarlet pools in which the sunshine flashed, and the blood straining through the scupper-holes, and marking long dull-red lines down the ship's side, and crimsoning the green water where they touched it.

The corvette was more wrecked aloft than appeared at first sight : her main-top mast was badly wounded, the after part of her main-top shot away, and to starboard her mainmast was supported by two shrouds only. I saw that if the wind freshened these spars must go, unless the canvas was handed and preventer backstays set up. I accordingly jumped on to the rail, and waved my hat to the *Tigress*, signifying that I wanted to speak her, on which her helm was put up and she stood towards us.

Surrounded as I was by the ghastly memorials of the conflict, it seemed scarcely a moment in which room could be found for admiring the beauty of the schooner: yet, so ennobled was she by her triumph, she did so plead to my admiration, that I could not remove my eyes from her as she swept down before the bright breeze, floating like a swan on the deep green waves, which ran along her ebony sides without lifting her, and revealing as they curled past, the vivid sheen of her metal sheathing, while the British cannon bristled under her high bulwarks, and her white sails, delicately shaded at the after-leeches, soared upon a sky whose ripe afternoon beauty made a superb background for one of the gracefulest fabrics which ever breasted the waters of the deep.

As I knew Shelvocke would sing out some inquiries, I put a few questions to my Napoleonic friend, who remained at my side, and whose utter dejection deprived me both of the will and the wish to send him below, though I believe it was my duty to have done so. In a few minutes the *Tigress* was within speaking range, whereupon she

hauled up the clew of her main-sail, and ranged abreast of us with her sails shaking.

‘*Tigress*, ahoy !’ I shouted.

‘Hallo !’ answered Shelvocke, standing on the rail of the bulwark.

‘You had better send some men aboard to fish and doctor the corvette’s spars, sir, a few of which are badly wounded. We are terribly crippled aloft, and a gang of thirty men won’t be too many to do what is wanted.’

Shelvocke raised his hand to betoken that he heard me : and after a short interval, during which a boatswain’s pipe sang like a bird on the schooner’s forecastle, a couple of boats full of men shoved off.

Whilst they approached, Shelvocke called to me to give him the particulars of the prize.

‘She’s the French thirty-eight gun corvette, *Diane*, Captain Eugene Tournelle,’ I answered, delivering my words through the hollows of my hands, and shouting at the top of my voice ; for not only was the wind dead in my teeth, but overhead the sails were shaking like a thousand cocks flapping their wings for a crow, and the water washed noisily along the


side of the motionless hull. 'She mounts a few long eighteens and twenty-six sixty-four pound carronades. It is believed that she has twenty-eight men killed, twelve of them by the bursting of a gun, among them her commander, and between thirty and forty wounded, including her second and third lieutenants. Her complement is three hundred and eight, and she has seven English prisoners aboard, being a portion of the crew of H.B.M.'s cutter *Severn*, which she captured three days ago, with despatches, ten miles to the norrard of Cuxhaven.'

Shelvocke again waved his hand, and got off the rail and went aft, where he stood looking over the taffrail at the two-decker, that had gone about and was lying up to fetch us under every stitch of sail that would draw.

I had now half the *Tigress's* crew aboard ; and, with the help of the boatswain and carpenter, I started them on the various refitting jobs which the corvette immediately required. There were some shot-holes in her hull that wanted plugging, but none between wind and water, and the pumps gave us an almost dry

hold. What needed most attention was the main-mast; that, on examination, was found to have received one of our twenty-four pound shot about half-a-dozen feet below the top.

Our men were appalled by the sight of the dead upon the decks, and seemed glad enough to jump aloft to get away from the bodies. I inquired of the first lieutenant for the body of the captain, and was told that he had been carried below on receiving his wound, and that the corpse lay in the state-cabin. Shocking as the ship looked with the dead scattered about her decks, I could not glance my eye over her without pride and wonder. She was only a year old ; and in spite of her having been ploughed into a shambles and so cut up in her rigging that, fore and aft, she was littered with ropes'-ends, fragments of canvas, splinters, blocks, and such-like raffle, together with capsized tubs, muskets, pikes, and a whole ocean of different kinds of shot—enough hints yet survived to suggest the beautiful completeness she had exhibited before she came into action. Where her decks were not stained with blood or blackened with the grime of powder, they



were as white as the paper on which this is printed. Her brass-work was so radiant that the eye was blinded by the sparkle of the sunshine in it ; her guns were noble pieces of ordnance ; her masts and yards, magnificent spars : the French love of embellishment had gone so far in her, that even the coamings of her hatches were ornamented with graceful carvings ; every rope lying in the chafe of another was carefully served ; and the ends of most of her running rigging, instead of being 'pointed' or 'whipped' as with us, were fitted with small brass caps. There was a 'cap of liberty' on the skylight, an object about seven inches long, made of wood and painted red, with a round tapering spear of brass three and a half inches long, the lower half blackened, with a screw at the end, to fix it to the mast-head—a genuine republican signal, which many French vessels in those days sent aloft when they went into action, but which, in the case of the *Diane* had probably been overlooked amidst the confusion when she missed stays.

The French lieutenant, who appeared crushed with his misfortunes watched me as I

ran my eyes over the corvette, and when our glance met, he said :

‘A fine sheep, sare.’

‘Ay,’ I rejoined, ‘a vessel that does honour to the skill of your dockyards.’

‘But she will fight ze battles of Great Bretagne now, monsieur,’ he exclaimed, mournfully.

‘It is the fortune of war, sir,’ I answered, repeating his own remark.

‘What a prize for zat footy leetel sheep!’ cried he, extending his hands with a passionate gesture of annoyance and astonishment as he looked at the *Tigress*. ‘Your papaires vill make moch of this, sare, no doubt.’

‘Still we would rather have risked another hour’s fight with you than have seen those colours up there flying with that English ship in sight.’

‘Yes, I understan’,’ said he, with a shrug of the shoulders, and raising his hat he went below.

His wonder that the *Diane* should have fallen a prize to the schooner was quite reasonable. The result of the engagement I

considered little short of a miracle when I contrasted the sizes of the two vessels, and considered the difference between the strength of the crews and the weight of the metal. If it had not been that the *Tigress's* fore-topmast was shot away under the royal yard, she would have exhibited no visible injury whatever aloft, beyond the shot-holes in her canvas. Also we had suffered a very trifling loss in men, and our hull was but little damaged, in consequence of the habit of the French gunners of elevating their pieces so as to cripple their enemies' spars. Comparing the *Tigress's* condition with that of the *Diane's*, and bearing in mind the schooner's qualities, and Shelvocke's clever handling of her, I began to sympathise with my captain's chagrin when I looked over the corvette's lee quarter, and watched the British two-decker edging up for us. Argue as we might, *her* presence would rob us of half the glory of our conquest. No one would credit that this thirty-eight-gun corvette would have struck to a privateer of twelve guns, had the British line-of-battle ship not hove in sight. But it could not be helped, and I now waited im-

patiently for the two-decker to come up to us, as it was evident that Shelvocke meant to take instructions from her before he left the ground.

Strong as was the sense of pique in me, however, I could not behold the majestic fabric drawing along the water without kindling emotions. Her stately heights of canvas slanted her about a couple of streaks, and she presented her weather broadside as she swam forward, her long jib-booms pointing, like the spear of a Colossus, a few points to leeward of our bow, and her prodigious stretch of cloths filling a broad space of sky with canvas that glistened like snow on a mountain-top. Her double lines of guns grinned along the white streaks, and the green and foamy surges toppling against her huge side looked, by contrast with her bulk, no more than the ripples of an inland lake. Her long pennant flashed like a line of fire against the deep azure, and, starting from that great altitude, the eye ran down a succession of widening sails and spars of black rope, and the exquisite lacework of the thin, running gear. Her forecastle rail was dotted with seamen dressed

in white, and figures could be seen in her tops, while here and there a window glanced back the play of the luminous water, and a small bed of foam hung like a heap of snow at her stem, and twinkled frostily along the gold-bronze metal armour that sheathed her bottom.

She proved to be His Britannic Majesty's ship *Endymion*, and as she floated into a position abeam of us she clewed up her light sails and courses and backed her fore-yards all simultaneously, as though the whole operation had been performed by pulling a lever, as the motion of a crank sets a hundred dolls dancing in a breath. No sooner was she at rest than a boat was lowered from the *Tigress*, into which jumped Shelvocke, and pulled away to the seventy-four.

All this time the weather remained magnificent, with a soft fresh wind blowing out of the south, and here and there a wool-white cloud speeding across the liquid blue like a puff of steam. I have often thought that the three vessels, as they lay abreast, made as striking an after-battle picture as any which the records of single actions could supply.

The presence of the line-of-battle ship with her sky-searching masts and enormous breadth of yards, on which a man looked no bigger than a fly, and the superb completeness of her trim aloft, and the sparkle of epaulets at the gangway and the colour of the uniforms of the marines and of a number of soldiers which she had on board, lent such an emphasis to the maimed, blood-stained, and crippled corvette, whose spars were dotted with our men at work on the difficult and perilous job of refitting, as she would hardly have taken from the neighbourhood of the *Tigress* only.

In truth, I was glad to look anywhere but on the deck of the prize where the dead lay. It was evidently the broadside we had given her when she missed stays and whilst we were tacking under her quarter that had done most execution; and considering the small quantity of powder that had been burnt in this action, the condition of the *Diane's* spars and rigging and the sieve-like appearance of her after-bulwarks illustrated in a manner that struck me forcibly the extraordinary precision with which our guns had been pointed.

Just as the boat containing Shelvocke passed under the stern of the *Endymion*, the lieutenant of the corvette came up out of the cabin and stood for some moments with his hand resting on the companion, looking at the big ship. He glanced round at me and broke from his reverie with an apologetic smile.

‘We have built some fine ships for your service, monsieur,’ said he in French. ‘That vessel was our *Renommée*, and once carried the flag of Admiral Villebert.’

I replied in English that our Government was quite willing to leave France in possession of her fleets, providing she would use them for the preservation of her own trade instead of the destruction of the trade of other nations. ‘We have in our country,’ said I, ‘a place called Hartwell, where there lives a country gentleman known by the name of Monsieur. You have doubtless heard of him, sir. He may not be able to gain you ships, but if you will call him to Paris he’ll show you how to keep what you have.’

‘*Sot ! animal ! fainéant !*’ said he, grinding out the words between his teeth and

turning away with an expression of bitter indignation after having bestowed upon me a frown so Buonapartesque (if I may use such a word) that the resemblance was enough to make a man laugh outright. Whether these flattering epithets were meant for me or 'Monsieur' I did not know, and to be plain, I did not care. I never thought much of a Frenchman's rage. Perhaps I should have spared the observation that annoyed him; but it was almost impossible to look at him without irritation, he was so deucedly like the Corsican bully. However, I was sorry for the poor fellow's situation, and recognised the claim he had upon my utmost civility; so mustering up the blindest smile at my command, I begged his pardon if I had said anything to offend him, and changed the subject by asking him how his ship had managed to miss stays?

He gave me the technical reasons, but as he did not know the English equivalents, and as I could not understand the French professional terms, he left me as wise as I was at the beginning. Had he said they had

jammed her up in the wind, and stopped her way before they put the helm down, he would have given the right explanation. But he talked of *le vent* and *le gouvernail* and the *démoralisation* of the *timmonier*, so far as I could follow him, and made a long scientific yarn out of an incident which was to be explained by two words, 'Bad seamanship.'

The English prisoners had been liberated on our coming aboard, and had been sent aloft along with the *Tigress's* men to help doctor the spars and rigging. Some of them, as well as a portion of my own men, having finished the jobs allotted to them, came down, and I ordered them to range the dead bodies decorously and cover them with a spare sail until orders for their disposal should have been received. I imagined the fellows would not like the task; the *Tigresses* certainly went about it reluctantly, and from some of the ghastlier things they hung back with such disordered countenances that I had scarcely the heart to urge them on. But the men out of the captured cutter had no compunction. Their treatment of the dead was grossly indecent and revolting. Every insult that it

was possible for them to offer, they heaped upon the remains of their dead enemies, and from time to time one or the other of them would make some remark which invariably produced a shout of laughter from his inhuman companions.

‘What are you about?’ I shouted, horrified by the rascals’ behaviour, and enraged that the French lieutenant should witness such conduct in British seamen. ‘Why, the South Sea cannibals would set you an example in decency, you brutes! Treat those bodies respectfully, do you hear? or I’ll send such a report to the captain of that ship yonder as will earn you the best lashing that ever you got in your lives.’

‘Please your honour,’ answered one of them, pointing to a body, ‘this here cove kicked me on the shins yesterday for axing him for a chew of tobacco.’

‘And they thought nothen of calling our King a cochong, sir!’ bawled another.

‘I don’t care about that,’ said I. ‘Handle those bodies respectfully, or I’ll have you stretched until you’re thin enough to crawl aboard through a scupper-hole.’

I watched them sharply, thinking that, as men in receipt of King's pay, they might dispute the authority of a privateersman, in which case I should have set my own men upon them; but they took fright at my threatening to report them, and one of them looking over the bulwarks and seeing a boat pulling towards us from the *Endymion*, they went to work as soberly as monks, and in a few minutes the dead were hidden, though in the waist and forward there was blood upon almost everything the eye rested on.

The French lieutenant went below when he saw the *Endymion's* boat; and observing Shelvocke and an officer in her, I sung out for the side to be manned. The foam flashed up in smoke under the boat's bows as she advanced, swept along by twelve oars which dropped and rose with beautiful precision, whilst beyond her floated the huge two-decker, as motionless as a tower upon the water, and the reflection of the lustrous waves trembling in her sides as you may see the sunlight gleam in the well-curried hide of a horse.

The moment Shelvocke gained the deck he shook me by the hand and thanked me for my assistance in the engagement that had made this noble ship prize to the *Tigress*. His manner was more gratifying than his words. The officer who accompanied him, making me a bow, said that he considered the achievement of the schooner truly remarkable, 'and I only regret,' said he, 'she is not a King's ship, that her commander and officers might obtain the reward which their courage merits.'

All this was very nice, and I think that we had some right to feel proud when we saw the officer looking around at the vessel, and at her heavy batteries, and her powerful scantling, and the wreckage aloft; and then at the *Tigress*, the audacious little instrument of this new disaster to poor Johnny Frenchman, lying to windward, slightly lifting to the green waters which played round her stationary hull, with nothing missing aloft but her royal and sky-sail yards, and her white canvas filling and shivering as she fell off and came to under the action of the helm.

It had been arranged aboard the liner that the prisoners were to remain in the prize, that I was to take charge of her to Portsmouth with such of the crew of the *Tigress* as were on board, and that, as in consequence of the division of the schooner's crew, neither she nor the corvette would be in a position to engage any enemy's ship that might come upon the scene, the *Endymion* would convey us to Portsmouth. Having therefore given me the instructions I required, Shelvocke returned to the schooner and the officer to the *Endymion*; and on the latter firing a gun, we sheeted home the fore and main top-sails and under as much canvas as we dared carry stood after the two-decker, with the *Tigress* on our weather quarter.

So terminated the action with the corvette, which, I need hardly say, we brought safely into Portsmouth, along with the *Hanover*, whom we overhauled at daybreak next morning. The *Diane* was purchased by the English Government, and taken into the Navy under the name of the *Diana*. She was wrecked off the Isle d'Oléron only seven months after she had refitted, and one

hundred and twelve persons perished with her.

Several accounts of the engagement appeared in the newspapers of the time ; but though the pluck of the *Tigress* was warinly praised, it was also said that the corvette had been hurried into striking by the *Endymion's* heaving in sight, and this robbed the bullion of its lustre, though it left the metal good gold all the same. We remained at Portsmouth twelve days, during which time the *Tigress* was visited by several hundreds of persons, so lively was the interest her exploit had raised. Among these visitors was Sir James, afterwards Lord de Saumarez, the hero of Algesiras, one of the bravest and certainly one of the most neglected men of that age, whose share in Aboukir was only second to that of Nelson, and who was rewarded by Evan Nepean's *private applause*, when men for smaller deeds were being raised to the peerage, and getting the thanks of Parliament. Shelvocke was in London at the time, and I had the honour of receiving this brave and Christian gentleman, and relating to him the story of the action with the Frenchman

He said to me as he went over the side : 'I have always had a dislike to privateering as a business in which more evil is done than any government ought to sanction. Merchantmen have no right to fight unless in their own defence. But after hearing your story, and observing the discipline and beauty of this vessel, I shall hereafter think of privateering with indulgence.'

When I repeated this to Shelvocke, he said it was the best bit of praise he had yet received.



CHAPTER V.

CAPE ANTIFER.



HE triumphs of the *Tigress*, won within twenty-four hours after her departure from the West India Docks, and Shelvocke's clever and audacious handling of her, had given wonderful confidence and enthusiasm to the men, who not only knew the qualities of the vessel, but their power to fight an enemy three times the *Tigress's* size ; and when the schooner, thoroughly refitted, and with her full complement of men aboard, set sail from Portsmouth, there was not a crew afloat upon the seas at that time more resolute, hearty, and united than the ninety brave fellows who swung their hammocks in the 'tween-decks of Hannay's beautiful privateer.

I never felt the gladness and independence of our life of licensed freebooting more keenly than on this day as I stood on the *Tigress's* quarter-deck looking at the distant green-crowned heights of the Isle of Wight, with Nettleston Point drawing out to Bainbridge, and receding into Sandown Bay, where the coast-line melted into a film of blue cloud, with a line of lustrous white between it and the throbbing waters of the horizon, while the broad English Channel opened into an interminable reach of gleaming sea over our bows.

The wind was off the shore, and we went along leisurely, with the main-boom well over the quarter, and the huge square-sail softly lifting, and the water creaming past us ; when, Dunnose being a pale blue blob no bigger than a pea astern of us, a sail hove in sight that, on nearing, proved to be a small armed English cutter, having in tow a large French schooner, cut to pieces aloft. It was as odd a sight as ever I saw, and the men stood laughing at it until the tears hopped down their iron visages ; for the cutter was certainly not more than five-and-thirty tons, and looked

deplorably ragged and dirty ; whereas the hulk, for she was a schooner no longer, having only her lower masts sticking out of her deck like two immense pumps, was considerably over a hundred tons, with four guns of a side, and a big brass swivel on the forecastle ; so that, as they crept along the sea, they resembled an ant hauling a caterpillar into its nest, or a puppy with the carcase of a sheep made fast to its tail.

We ran down for a near view, and on hailing the cutter, a midshipman, about the size of a common monkey, got upon the rail, and asked what we wanted.

‘ Are you in charge ? ’ inquired Shelvocke.

‘ Certainly I am, ’ answered the middy, in a haughty drawl, thrusting his hands into his pockets.

‘ You appear to have a lumping prize astern of you, ’ said Shelvocke, preserving his gravity with an effort.

‘ Yes ; but, you see, we’ve dismasted her, though not before they killed all the cutter’s officers but me. ’

‘ Where are your prisoners ? ’

‘ Most of ’em overboard, but there are thirty

of them in the hulk ; and if you were going my way, I'd ask you to lend me a couple of those fat, grinning hands of yours to *sit upon* the prize's fore-hatch, as I can only muster seven men, five of whom are wanted to work the cutter, so that there are only two to guard the hulk's hatches ; and they're so reduced in flesh by feeding on Admiralty stores, that if the Frenchmen were only to combine their lungs and fetch a heavy breath, I'll be hanged if they wouldn't blow my men overboard like chaff !' and the little fellow laughed so uproariously that he lost his balance and toppled backwards on the deck, though he was up again in a moment.

'We'll convoy you in if you like,' sung out Shelvocke.

'No, thanks ; we've managed without you so far, and we'll risk what remains. I say,' he shrieked through his hands, for we were fast widening our distance, 'how far are we off the Isle of Wight ?'

'St. Catherine's Point bears about fourteen miles N.W. by W.'

The plucky little creature flourished his hat and dropped on to the deck, where, the

bulwarks being taller than he, we lost sight of him. Aboard the hulk we could only see two men, armed with cutlasses and muskets, standing at the fore-hatch, and a boy steering. Whether there were really thirty prisoners below, it was impossible to say ; but that the prize was a genuine capture, and won by a desperate fight, was proved not only by the smallness of the number of the cutter's people, but by the manner in which she was cut up aloft and by the shots in her hull and the splintered condition of her bulwarks and stern.

‘Smite my timbers, Bill, if ever I see the like of that!’ I heard one of our boatswain's mates exclaim as he looked after the cutter ; ‘no wonder old Wooden Shoes funks us when newly weaned British babbies go forth and capture his vessels.’

Although Shelvocke did not want to insult the little chap by keeping near him, he shortened sail and hauled to the westward, and so held the cutter and her prize in sight until shortly after one o'clock, when, the cutter having tacked, we sighted a sloop-of-war, apparently fresh from Spithead, coming down

towards the two vessels, on which, as we knew she would give the midshipman all the help he required, we made sail, and stood for the French coast.

We dined this day at two o'clock, and Peacock was invited to join. So four of us sat down, whilst Tapping stumped the hot deck overhead. It was cool enough, however, in the little cabin ; for the mild wind blew in a pleasant draught down the open skylight, through which you could see the immense main-sail stretching in a whole ocean of white canvas against the sky, whilst the long withe-like top-mast, that terminated at a height of a hundred and forty feet from the cabin-floor, seemed, like a pencil in the hand of a giant, to be making a scroll of the face of the heavens, as the gentle motion of the vessel swept the point of the tall spar here and there.

I ate my dinner thankfully, for I was as hungry as a wolf, whilst Chestree let his plate grow cold over some long yarn of a cutting-out expedition he had picked up from a third lieutenant whom he had met at Portsmouth. On my ear it was a story that fell

flat enough; but Peacock attended, with his handsome eyes gleaming like the optics of a Spanish woman when listening to the man she loves, and his delicate cheeks glowed with as pretty a damask as ever the eloquent blood wrought in the human face.


I caught Shelvocke—when he thought himself unperceived—watching the lad with great admiration, and another expression which I cannot very well define : it was such a mixture of melancholy and pleasure, half-wistful, half-reluctant, as though memory were working against the will ; but in all which I should have found nothing to marvel at, seeing that the youth had one of the most beautiful faces I ever beheld out of the canvas of some of the Italian masters, not to mention his melodious voice and an indescribably delightful gentleness of manner mingled with a sound element of manliness, had not the skipper suddenly caught me with my eyes fixed on him, whereupon the pensive expression went out of his face with an abruptness that, had it been acted, would have been thought as fine a thing as Kemble's transitions from softness to scorn in *Hamlet*;

and for some moments he was as cold and stern as ever I remember seeing him when preparing his vessel to engage.

However, he presently thawed, and asked me to take wine with him.

‘You remember the French lugger we chased, Madison?’ said he—‘she that burned the little *Happy-go-Lucky*? I have often been bothered to think what she could have meant by booming out her lugs and running dead for the Goodwins. My idea was that they meant to run her aground and set fire to her, and drag their boats over the sand into the waters beyond and escape in that way. But a pilot whom I met in London, and to whom I told the story, said that this was an old trick of Johnny’s—that what they were really trying for was a swatchway about a mile to the east of the South Sand Head. They could have floated over by dropping their guns and stores overboard, and had they managed it they would have escaped. Their dodges are a proper study, and I live and learn.’

‘Strange that the French, who are so fond of dancing that a lump of sugar in a glass of



water will set them capering, don't like our English *balls*,' said Chestree, grinning with his capacious mouth over his vile pun.

'By the way, Chestree, talking of balls, you were rather against our engaging the *Diane*, weren't you, eh?' exclaimed Shelvocke.

'Yes, sir, I was—I considered she was too big for us, sir,' answered Chestree, candidly.

'Nothing is too big for us,' said Shelvocke, shortly.

'No, not to look at, sir—but to fight! One Englishman is equal to ten Frenchmen, I'll allow—but when you come to double that number——'

'Pooh, pooh!' interrupted Shelvocke, 'never talk of counting your enemies, man. Had you begun to *compute* when you were third of the *Syria*, and headed the boarders who cleared the decks of *Le Phoenix*, where would you be now? Why, the French worms would be polishing your bones, man, wouldn't they? Never trouble yourself to *think* when once fighting becomes necessary. That's the principle of that magnificent fellow Cochrane, who is the noblest Roman of us all since Nelson's death. Lord Gambier, poor old

thing, *thought*, you may remember, and you know what came of it. Madison, this is no oblique denunciation of you, though I believe you were of Chestree's mind.'

'I was,' I answered, and was beginning to state my reasons when he interrupted me.

'Come, gentlemen, pass the wine along. Whatever people may be pleased to say concerning the audacity of the *Tigress's* commander, my resolution would have made but a ridiculous figure of me had I not officers not only equal to that occasion, but superior to any occasion my temerity is likely to bring about. Gentlemen, I give you the health of Buonaparte. May he long continue to build vessels for us to take!'

'I couple with the health of Buonaparte that of my name-sake, the President of the United States of America,' said I, emptying my glass.

'Hush!' said Shelvocke; 'before we toast him let us be sure that we can thrash him.'

'Do you think there is any doubt of that, sir?' inquired Peacock, in that sweet voice of his, which I never could hear pronouncing warlike language without smiling.

'I do, Mr. Peacock, indeed. I would not

own as much just now at a Mansion-House dinner, for instance, nor whisper it within a league of St. James's. But so surely as I sit at the head of this table—which, by the way, and as I have all along thought, would be the better for another six inches of beam, seeing that it has to accommodate Chestree's shanks for a cruise which I hope may last for months—so surely, gentlemen, will the Yankee captains give their fellow-republicans an account of King George's cruisers that shall make some of us hang our heads. Mark well what I say, as among my other ambitions I wish to shine as a prophet. There will be a heap of horrible lies told; but from the ashes of Yankee fiction the future American historian of this unfortunate war of ours with beings who speak our tongue, and who, at heart, are pretty nearly as proud of us as we are of ourselves, will rake up some gems of truth to decorate the page that remains to be filled.'

'They would make a great man of you were you to go among them,' said I.

'Come, Madison, don't let prejudice blind you,' he exclaimed good-naturedly. 'I like

the Yankees as little as you. I will admit that their bad qualities are more numerous than our united fingers and thumbs. But give them time, man. When you were a little fellow, I'll warrant you stole mammy's sugar, and robbed old Ox's orchard, and went a bird-nesting. But such matters are not going to earn the conviction of your manhood. Give the Yankees time, I say; and whilst you denounce what is bad in them, admire the genius of a people who are quickly rearing a magnificent empire t'other side of the water, and who have in a superlative degree the admirable virtues of perseverance, courage, patience, and—yes, *and*—patriotism, whether you call them rebels or not.'

'Do you know, sir, I think we are going to have dirty weather,' said the prosaic-minded Chestree, shoving in his oar without the least intention of being rude, the poor fellow having been staring up the skylight whilst the skipper was sporting his periods, until he was so engrossed with the look of the sky as to sing out without reflection.

'Thanks, Chestree, for saving me the trouble of *perorating*,' replied Shelvocke,

laughing ; and rising, he led the way out of the cabin.

There was some shrewdness in Chestree's perception, for though the sky was blue enough to have made a landsman in love with it, with a bank of rich white clouds down in the east, and a few lines of vapour overhead, in the pearly margins of which the sun had painted a dozen languid tints like the colours of a fading rainbow, there was a haziness about the azure, a blearedness resembling the film on a sick man's eyes, that betokened a change of weather. The breeze was steady, well on the starboard quarter as we headed west-by-south, with nothing but the gleaming heaving sea around us.

I asked Shelvocke if he had any special cruising ground in his mind.

'None whatever,' said he. 'As we go we shall raise Cape Levi by holding on, and we may find something to serve us creeping out of Cherbourg. We can only grope and hope—that's the privateer's article of faith. I asked everybody I met both in Portsmouth and in London for news of a convoy, but could get no information.'

‘I think you were right when you said that the West Indies are our true latitudes. There are too many brooms sweeping this Channel to leave any good findings, unless, indeed, we confine our hopes to the enemy’s Government ships.’

‘That’s just it,’ he exclaimed : ‘whereas in the western Atlantic we are not only pretty sure of Frenchmen, but of Yankees also. However, we may get an oyster or two off the coast of France, by jogging along it, and should Ushant come abeam without anything turning up, we’ll head into the big waters, Mr. Madison.’

‘What think you of the weather, captain?’

‘Why, I think we shall have a black night: but there’s no appearance of wind.’

‘We have tested the *Tigress* in calms and fresh breezes,’ said I ; ‘and I want to see her in a gale of wind.’

‘Time enough ! time enough !’ said he, pulling out a cigar and walking aft, where he stood near the binnacle watching the vessel, and throwing keen looks around the sea.

As the afternoon wore away the blue of the sky grew thicker, and though every cloud

had vanished, yet an indefinable smoky sort of veil, through which the blue was apparent, but pale and sickly, appeared to be drawing up all around the horizon, while the sun in the west shone with intense heat, though with a dull, reddish, subdued light ; and the orb itself, that was not so brilliant but that the eye could rest upon it for some moments, had a remarkably clean and well-defined edge, like that of the rising moon on a hot August night.

It was melancholy to look around upon the sea, and mark the desolation of waters which in time of peace swarmed with vessels trading to all parts of the world. In spite of Howe (begging Shelvocke's pardon) and St. Vincent and Nelson, and a multitude of magnificent feats of valour performed by single ships, the Danes in the North Sea, and the French in the Channel and away south past the Mediterranean, were disputing every foot of the sea with us, and our naval supremacy was being recovered not only at a prodigious cost of human lives, but by the loss of millions to British merchants. Few trading vessels durst venture on a voyage alone, and for days and days the only sort of craft to be

met in the Channel were the Government ships of England and France, and privately armed vessels like our schooner, with here and there a few fishing boats, or a coasting sloop creeping cautiously along, close inshore. It was perhaps the dull and loaded look of the sky, and the oppressive redness of the sunlight, and the muddy green of the sea, that lent, to my imagination, a peculiarly mournful impressiveness to the blank waters around me. They gave me a notion of the horrors of war, more startling and affecting than is got from the butcheries of a battle-field or the carnage on a ship's decks. It was like viewing the once populous and brightly-coloured thoroughfare of a town that has been laid waste by a siege, with the roofless and ruined houses yawning in grim silence, and no sound of life but now and again the clank of a musket grounded on an echoing pavement.

I went below at four bells in the first dog-watch to lie down; and on coming on deck again at eight o'clock, I found the sun setting and the wind gone round to the east. I never beheld a scene of gloomier grandeur in

British latitudes. The whole of the western sea-line was buttressed by masses upon masses of ponderous clouds, resembling gigantic fortifications, with the forms of castles, and moles, and towers, and walls, sufficiently well-defined to make the illusion extraordinary. They rested upon a sea of cochineal that emitted no radiance, but stood like a surface of blood under the sun, whose flashing was dulled by the indefinable pall of mirky haze that overhung the whole of the heavens ; but the upper extremities of the clouds, being near the sun, glowed like red-hot iron, while streaks of purple and orange shot the surface of the vaporous masses whose centres were round, and of a darkish cream-colour, like the distended sails of a ship in moonlight.

Meanwhile out of the east, wherein lay the delicate pink reflection of the sunset, a fresh wind was whistling and striking one's lips with a salt and tart flavour, from the whipping of the foaming surface of the water. The schooner was tearing through it at a great rate, though under her main-sail and jib only, with the muzzles of her starboard tier of

guns almost level with the flashing froth that whirled away alongside, and with the spray smoking over her forecastle and cooling her decks as far aft as the gangway. Had this wind been blowing out of the bank of clouds in the west I should have calculated on its freshening into a gale ; as it was, the most inexpert reader of weather-signs might have guessed it would drop soon, or rattle round to the west.

Hardly had the sun vanished, and whilst its rays were forking, like a glory round the head of a saint, out of the clouds, gilding our top-masts with fiery lines and turning our upper rigging into gold wire, whilst all below was in evening gloom, when a look-out man who was stationed aloft reported a sail on the weather bow. We sprang for our glasses, but nothing was to be seen from the deck. I ran forward and trotted aloft to have a view of the stranger before the shadows deepened, and from the fore top-sail yard could just catch a glimpse of the spars and canvas of a brig, hove to with her head to the eastward and her fore top-sail to the mast. Believing that she would not be alone, I shinned on to

the royal yard, and from this immense elevation searched the sea, but the brig was all that I could discover. Before I reached the deck the sea lay darkling, and of the gorgeous sunset nothing survived but a dull reddish flush lingering over the brow of the clouds.

Shelvocke asked me how far I reckoned the brig to be off, and I answered about thirteen miles. He walked hurriedly to the compass and then looked over the side, and presently ordered the fore-sail and main topmast stay-sail to be set. These were large sails, and under them one could feel the *Tigress* tearing up the water, and the parted seas as they raced along her sides hummed like a continuous roll on a drum.

Darkness in these parallels, however, never closely follows sunset, even with a cloudy sky; for some time after the hectic tinge had faded out of the west there remained a sort of sallow grey light in the air, that enabled the eye to determine the boundary-line of the deep; and before complete darkness settled down we had risen the brig so as to render her visible from the deck, though even with the glass we could form no just notion of her size and

character, the only certain thing about her being that she still lay hove to, as though she waited for a boat, or expected some craft to heave in sight.

When the night at last really closed round, it was as dark as a pocket, to use Jack's phrase. And, as most of us had expected, the wind failed us, not suddenly, but with a sober fining down, graduating into softness as though through the operation of some mechanical contrivance, until from a fresh strong breeze nothing but a languid current of air was perceptible; and even this presently ceased, and then we lay in a breathless calm, the schooner rolling quietly to the little swell which the wind had left behind, and her sails rattling against the rigging in sounds so like musket-reports as to frequently cause me to start and look around, with the darkness so dense that from the skylight the figure of the man at the tiller was invisible, and a ponderously black sky overhead that seemed to touch our mast-heads. Here and there a gleam of light raised a luminous mist along the obscured decks, from the main-hatch, from the galley, and from the skylight

over the cabin; and as the figures of the men passed through these illuminated spaces it was strange to witness the apparition of their rugged forms with their eyes glittering and their breasts exposed, and their muscular arms hanging bare; and then to completely lose sight of them as they stepped away from the sphere of light into the darkness.

Shelvocke called my name, and I went up to him, guided by the glowing tip of his cigar.

‘I don’t ask if you can see any sign of the brig,’ said he, speaking in a low tone, for the influence of this oppressive darkness insensibly subdued one’s voice into a whisper; ‘but how far do you reckon she was distant when the wind dropped?’

‘I have been calculating, sir, and I should say the schooner is within a mile of her.’

‘That should be about it—our reckoning tallies. Pass the word forward to hide all lights, and get a tarpaulin stretched over this skylight.’

These orders were obeyed, and in a few minutes the vessel was wrapped in blackness. I returned to Shelvocke.

‘It’s enough to stifle a man,’ said he. ‘I

never remember a darker night. I'm waiting for a flash of lightning to give us some rain and relieve this over-stuffed sky.'

'I have stationed a couple of men forward and two at the gangways, with sharp instructions to keep their ears open. The brig *may* prove a friend, sir, but I am always suspicious of short yards and great hoist of top-sail,' said I.

He seemed to pay no attention to this, but after puffing strongly at his cigar he sung out to Tapping.

'Yes, sir,' responded the third mate, who stood somewhere forward of the main-mast.

'Call some hands aft to get this main-sail in. Let go the stay-sail halliards, and get both jibs stowed. Let the men keep silence.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

'This is the business of the fog over again,' said I.

'Why, yes, in one sense; only there is no sulphur in fogs, Mr. Madison; and when I think of lightning, I think of my powder magazine,' he replied.

The men came along the deck as softly as cats, although they had to grope their way.

Presently the canvas was taken in, and this quieted the schooner, though the fore-sail gave a short slap sometimes when the vessel rolled, and the shrouds complained. Shelvocke stood sucking at his cigar in silence, and I was leaving him to go forward, when he said :

‘ Get the nettings triced up, and pass the word along for the watch below to keep wide awake ready for a call to quarters ; also, clap a round of grape over the round shot in the chasers, and send the carpenter aft.’

These orders were promptly executed, and when I joined Shelvocke again he was talking to the carpenter.

‘ It can easily be managed,’ he was saying, evidently combating some difficulty Mr. Chips had interposed, ‘ by lashing, or nailing—but they had better be lashed, as I want no hammering—some half-inch stuff at each side of the cask, and that will keep the bunghole uppermost. See that your light is securely fitted, and get a jewel-block made fast to the extreme end of the main-boom, and another to the end of the flying jib-boom, with lines ready rove, so that when the cask is over-

board, it can be hauled away to the length of those booms from the vessel's bow or stern. Do you understand me ?

‘ Yes, sir.’

‘ Then get about it at once. There is no harm in making ready,’ he continued, addressing me. ‘ Hark ! what is that ?’

‘ Rain,’ I replied, as a drop, heavy and warm as a gout of blood, splashed on my nose.

Only a few drops fell, and all was silent again. It was oppressively hot, and going below to get a sou'-west cap to protect me against the rain that I expected every moment to open upon us, I found the cabin suffocatingly close, and came on deck again bathed in perspiration.

I went aft to look at the compass, the candle in which gave the only spot of light to the black air throughout the ship, and found that the schooner had drifted with her head to the northward, so as to bring that part of the sea where the brig was lying when we last saw her, almost directly astern of us. I put my head over the taffrail and listened and strained my eyes against the gloom ; but nothing disturbed the breathless silence save

the gurgle of the eddying water about the rudder, and the faint flapping of canvas forward.

I held my watch to the binnacle and noticed that it was past ten. Shelvocke's position was beacons by his cigar, otherwise I had not known whether he was on deck or below.

'Is that you, Madison?' said he, as I approached him.

'Yes, sir.'

'Anybody wanting to know what highly-wrought suspense or expectation is,' said he, 'should be with us here. It is not over-cheerful to be becalmed on a pitch-black night within hail of a vessel whose character you do not know, and whose boats may be under your channels whilst you are wondering whether she has seen you. To complete a situation of that kind, you only want a sooty sky choke-full of electricity, resting its ponderous burden of thunder-bolts upon your mast-heads, and likely at any moment to burst asunder and let fall an ocean of flame upon you.'

'I expect we shall have it when it *does*

come,' I answered, wiping from my face the perspiration that gathered again the moment I removed my handkerchief. 'It's a *leettle* too warm, I take it, sir, for people whose lungs are not diseased. Look yonder! there's the first composant I have seen this cruise.'

A ball of very delicate blue fire, that sometimes looked green, was poised in the air as high as the top-sail yard-arm, upon the point of which it no doubt hovered; though, as the spars were invisible, the luminous thing seemed to be afloat in the void, and hanging like a star. It produced a curious effect, for with a very small effort of imagination the eye was easily cheated into believing it a prodigious distance off, and that the heavens, having extinguished the familiar luminaries, had given birth to a new species of orb. It emitted a greenish mist for the space of a yard around it, and its reflection in the water was like an illuminated jelly-fish shining a long way down. It shifted its position presently, and went as high as the sky-sail yard-arm, then vanished; but in a few minutes it reappeared on the fore-stay, where it shone

like a gigantic glow-worm, and faintly lighted up the figures of some men who stood in a group near the starboard cathead looking at it. It then floated out to the end of the flying jib-boom, and after swinging to and fro like a bubble on a pipe-stem, it disappeared.

Scarcely had it vanished, when a whole galaxy of similar lights was kindled all over the schooner's spars and rigging, and the water around swarmed with their reflection. One of them hovered over the breech of the gun near which Shelvocke and I were standing, and we could see each other's face, looking as green as a spring leaf, distinctly. They went out one by one, apparently being extinguished the moment they were disconnected from the iron and woodwork of the vessel, and all was black as pitch again.

Suddenly a voice forward called out a question sharply and hurriedly. Some one midway between us and the speaker cried, 'Hush! listen, can't you?' Immediately after, Tapping pronounced my name.

'Hillo!' I answered, looking in the direction whence his voice proceeded.

‘Will you please step aft, sir? I fancied I heard the dip of oars just now.’

Shelvocke and I went to the taffrail, where we found Tapping. We all three listened, and in a few seconds heard the dripping sound made by muffled oars when lifted out of the water.

‘I expected this; though, if they be Frenchmen, it’s unlike them!’ exclaimed Shelvocke, softly. ‘Mr. Tapping, go and send Mr. Corney and the carpenter aft. Bear a hand. Men,’ addressing the fellows who stood grouped around the stern-chaser, ‘be careful not to fire until the order is given, and then take sure aim. Point your gun deliberately. You will have no excuse to miss the mark, for you shall have a light to guide you.’

Corney and the carpenter came aft together. During Tapping’s absence the sound of approaching oars were quite audible, though they were evidently worked with extreme caution, and the boats moved slowly.

‘Carpenter,’ said Shelvocke, speaking hurriedly, ‘the barrel must be dropped astern, for the boats are yonder. Make ready to sling it

overboard, and be cautious not to douse the light in hauling on the line. Is that you, Corney ?'

'Yes, sir.'

'There are one or more boats astern. Be good enough to hail them in French, and represent us as Frenchmen.'

'Ho, the boat ahoy !' shouted Corney, with a real Gallican shriek.

No answer, and the sound of the dipping oars ceased.

'If you don't answer, we will fire into you !' rapped out Corney, rattling his r's with a throaty richness that would have baffled old Villeneuve himself.

'What vessel is that ?' sung out a gruff voice in French, apparently not more than a cable's length astern.

'The *Jean d'Acre*, Volberg, capitaine du vaisseau, bound to Cherbourg, from the East,' answered Corney, promptly.

On this there was a hail as from one boat to another, and the buzz of a dozen voices all speaking together.

'That shindy convicts them !' whispered Shelvocke to me. 'Only Frenchmen talk all

at once like that. Mr. Corney, ask them what they want.'

But owing to their jabbering like a lot of Boulogne fish-wives disputing, they probably did not hear the question, for no answer was returned. Their nationality, however, was unmistakable.

'Carpenter, get your blaze afloat smartly!' exclaimed Shelvocke. 'Men, take aim at the largest of the boats you can cover, or the nearest that you can see.'

Whilst he spoke, the carpenter had fired a blue-light, fixed in the bung of a small cask, to the sides of which a couple of short pieces of plank had been affixed to serve as outriggers. The apparatus was cautiously but quickly lowered over the side, and towed, by means of a line rove through a block at the end of the main-boom, astern, where it glanced out a broad circumference of ghastly illumination, within the further sphere of which we saw three large boats, which lay in solid black shapes upon the blue sheet of water, each boat full of men armed to the teeth, their weapons in the unearthly light appearing as if scored with lines of burning brimstone, while

beyond the ghastly luminous circle the sea stretched away into ebony blackness. The motionless boats, looking like centipedes, with their oars forking out on either side ; the pale-blue outlines of their crowded crews, resembling sketches done in phosphorus ; the quivering reflection of the boats in the fearful, death-like hue of the water ; and the pitchy, oppressive, imponderable blackness drooping its electric and breathless folds all around, formed an impressive and wonderful scene.

‘Quick, men!’ shouted Shelvocke. ‘Fire while the light holds! Take the nearest boat—she is the biggest!’

The Frenchmen saw the trick, and with a yell all three crews buckled to their starboard oars, which they were in the act of raising to pull their boats’ heads round, when Shelvocke gave the order to fire. The flash of the gun paled the blue-light as a sunbeam a candle, and the roar of the explosion was immediately followed by a crash and a perfect hurricane of shrieks, proving fearfully how our shot had told. At the same moment, and as if in rebuke of our presumption in mimicking the

tremendous artillery of the skies, the blackness overhead was rent asunder by an astounding flash of sun-bright lightning that revealed the whole surface of the sea, down to the nethermost circle of it, in the midst of which, and about three-quarters of a mile distant, lay a large brig, while *two boats only* were making for her, under furiously brandished oars.

The lightning was followed by a crash of thunder directly overhead. The concussion shook the schooner as though she had thumped upon a rock. The ear-splitting bellow was so confounding that, by the next glare of lightning, which followed the thunder after an interval of only a few seconds, I beheld the men standing motionless, like petrified figures. And then down came the rain, in a whole sheet, mingled with hail that boomed upon the hollow deck like a gale of wind through a line-of-battle ship's rigging. In an instant we were awash, and the water pouring in cascades out of the scupper-holes, and the sea around us flashing up in froth under the heavy discharge, whilst the lightning played *in tongues and lances* from the clouds, whose

huge masses, lying in layer upon layer, were revealed by every flash, and the thunder roared continuously.

The storm had indeed burst with a vengeance. It was right overhead, and fiercer lightning and louder thunder I never saw nor heard out of tropical latitudes. It was evident that the Frenchmen had not stopped to succour their shipmates whose boat had been knocked to pieces by our shot, nor would it have been reasonable for us to send help, as, the play of the lightning being incessant, our boat would have been exposed to the guns of the brig, whose people, we might be sure, would not recognise in our humanity any claim upon their forbearance. All that could be done, therefore, was to direct a look-out to be kept around the schooner for swimmers.

The rain and hail fell perpendicularly with such weight that it was difficult to stand upright under the discharge ; it poured down my back so as to completely fill out my shirt with water down to the waistband, and I felt as though buttoned up in one of those skins which the Arabs carry water in, in their jour-

neys along the African coast. Moreover, not only was the continuous cannonading of the thunder in the last degree bewildering, but the sight was rendered temporarily useless by the quick alternations between the dazzling blue flashes and the stone-blind darkness. However, I made shift to watch the brig, and presently noticed the boats reach her. On a sudden, the hoarse and rushing sound of the rain ceased, and though the lightning continued to flash with extraordinary fierceness, it was evident, from the increasing intervals between the flash and the thunder-shock, that the worst of the storm was settling away to the north.

All at once a voice hailed the schooner alongside: a lantern was slung over, and a man in the last stage of exhaustion was seen clinging to one of the main chain-plates. A bowline was lowered, into which he dropped his arms and was hoisted over the bulwarks. He proved to be a French soldier, probably of the *infanterie légère*, dressed in a single-breasted coat, the collar of which was a bright scarlet and coarse worsted epaulets and blue trousers. How he had managed to swim the

distance from where the boat had sunk to the schooner, seeing that he had a musket slung over his shoulder and a great pistol stuck in the belt round his waist, was an utter mystery to me. On gaining the deck he fell down in a heap, and was immediately carried below, where, in about ten minutes, he was sufficiently recovered to answer Corney's questions, who ascertained that the brig was the national vessel *La Patrie*, pierced for fourteen guns and mounting six long nine-pounders and one twenty-four-pound brass pivot. She had left Brest four days before as consort to a frigate that had signalled to her to heave to while she chased a suspicious-looking sail that was seen early in the morning standing to the westward. The brig's people, on sighting us before dusk, had taken us for an English trader which a lugger they had fallen in with on the previous night had reported was to pass down Channel, bound for Lisbon, with a valuable freight; and her boats had therefore been ordered out to attack us. The *La Patrie* had a draft of eighty troops of the line aboard, besides a crew of one hundred and thirty seamen, making in all two hundred

and ten souls, some of whom were priests. Of her people sixty were in the boats, half of whom were soldiers.

This information was hurriedly communicated to Shelvocke.

‘Sixty in the boats,’ said he musingly, looking at the vessel which the lightning continued to exhibit with perfect clearness: ‘divide sixty by three, leaves twenty who have been knocked out of time, and gives the brig one hundred and ninety men. If I flew a pennant I would risk it for the sake of promotion; but I must not needlessly expose my men, for if the brig should serve one of our boats as we served——’

He was silenced by a bright glare aboard the Frenchman, and a ball flashed up the water just astern of us. The lightning was playing in the north, but the thunder rolled with a subdued note, and the rain had entirely ceased. There was promise of improving weather in the west, but the gloom was still intense. The schooner had swung so as to present her starboard quarter to the brig, but the lightning revealed the enemy lying with her stern directly at us; and it was

evident from the character of the shot and the sound of the explosion, that she had trained a long nine-pounder through her after-port.

Hardly had the report of the brig's gun faded upon the ear when a sharply uttered order from Shelvocke filled the deck of the schooner with the glare of battle-lanterns. The crew stood at quarters waiting for the word of command, but I saw by Shelvocke taking up his position at the binnacle that he waited for the *Tigress* to swing her broadside to the Frenchman, who meantime kept blazing away at us with his one gun as fast as he could load ; he had elevated the piece, and the balls whistled through our rigging and struck the water a long distance ahead of us. It was impossible to see what mischief they did; sometimes a rope's-end would fall on the deck, sometimes a block, once there was a small crash of splintered wood aloft, but nothing heavy fell.

'Have you her bearings, men?' rang out Shelvocke's voice.

'Ay, ay, sir!'

'Wait for the next flash to point—aim low,

as I always tell you Now you have her—fire !'

Heaven preserve us ! if ever a vessel was raked that brig was. She was within point-blank range of the carronades, and the aim of the men was exact. But by this time she too had canted sufficiently to enable her to bring her broadside-guns to bear, and I believe she had traversed the guns from the idle side to the empty ports opposed to us, with a view to frightening us by an exhibition of metal, for she flashed into a whole sheet of flame, and we could hear portions of the iron hail tearing up the sea fathoms away from us, though some of the shots hulled us, as any man could have told by the quivering of the schooner.

She exchanged four broadsides with us, but our fifth was not answered. The lightning had ceased, and there was a pallid grey dawning upon the western sky. We could not see the brig, but the compass-bearings told us that the *Tigress* had swung bow on to her; on ascertaining which I sprang into the waist and ordered the forecastle gun to be double-shotted and fired.

The Frenchman remained silent.

I mounted the bulwark to see if I could distinguish her, and when I lifted my head above the bulwark I felt a draught of wind.

‘I expect she is leaving us, sir. She will have had the first of the breeze!’ I shouted.

‘After her, then,’ echoed Shelvocke. ‘All hands make sail! smartly, boys! we’ll give the newspaper men another job!’

A dozen of the crew bounded over to the main throat and peak halliards. ‘With a will, bully boys!’ bawled one of them, when—crack! the whole group lay sprawling on their backs, with the halliards writhing among them. The gear had been severed with a shot, and the troublesome business of reeving fresh halliards had to be performed. This was not the only wound our rigging had received. The jib-halliards were cut in halves, the gaff-topsail-sheet was on deck, and a couple of back-stays were trailing over-board.

However, all available canvas was set, the helm put down, and under a freshening breeze the *Tigress* stretched along the course which Shelvocke with instinctive accuracy guessed

the brig to be heading. Trifling repairs such as we needed are soon executed, even on the blackest night, when you have ninety men to do the work ; our lanterns illuminated the decks, and in less than ten minutes we were under a press of sail heading due south, and in chase of a bright light that was leading about a mile and a half ahead. This light had sprung up suddenly, and its appearance was reported to us by a hail from one of the look-out men.

‘Those Frenchmen call us barbarous!’ exclaimed Shelvocke laughing, after answering the hail, ‘and found their notions of us on the belief that we don’t read any nation’s history but our own. They may be right; but they forget that there is enough of the history of the world in the history of England to make any student of our story learned enough for all practical purposes. There’s a preface for a simple observation, Madison! Do you see that light? Now what imbeciles they must be to hope to trick us by such an old stratagem!’

‘Why, yes, sir; anybody may see through that trick.’

‘Forward, there!’ he shouted. ‘Fire the bow gun at that light. Elevate your piece, or you’ll bury the shot.’

The report followed within a few seconds of the command. The chase kept silence.

‘I have a noble crew, a splendid set of men, Madison!’ exclaimed Shelvocke, in a voice rich with enthusiasm. ‘I would to heaven you and I wore epaulets, and that my men took King’s pay. We’d make a name with such a body of seamen under our command.’

But recollecting the disaffection that was at that time notorious among the crews of many of His Majesty’s ships, and the difficulty that attended the procural of men to fill out the complements of vessels of war, I was inclined to doubt whether King’s pay would have inspired the *Tigresses* with the zealous unanimity that was one of their best characteristics.

‘Give them another dose!’ he sung out. ‘Ply them whilst that light shines.’

The gun was fired again: a moment after the light disappeared.

‘The idiots!’ muttered Shelvocke. ‘Now, Madison, mark them!’

The wind had freshened into a strong breeze. All away down in the west the sky had cleared, and here and there a watery star was tremulously glowing among rifts in the heavy clouds which solemnly journeyed across the dark heavens. The sea under the increasing wind was breaking into spaces of foam, and the roaring noise at the bows of the schooner, and the gleam of the belt of froth scurrying within the reach of a man's arm along the lee side, and the hooting up aloft, and the fierce patter of spray, like the discharge of small firearms upon the forecastle, indicated the speed of the *Tigress* and the pressure of canvas that was rushing her.

A minute after the light ahead had vanished : it reappeared. Shelvocke sprang to the compass ; he took a sharp look at the card, and shouted :

‘Put your helm up ! Ease away your sheets fore and aft. Fore-topsail-yard, there !’

The man stationed on that yard answered.

‘Look brightly about you, and report the brig the moment you see her.’

‘Ay, ay, sir !’

The men appeared astonished to find the

schooner leaving the light, which they did not doubt was aboard the enemy. It was right ahead just now, and now it was almost astern. I saw them looking over the bulwarks at it, and heard them talking; but Shelvocke appeared not only blind, but deaf too.

Presently he sung out :

‘Mr. Madison, let the watch be called. A stern chase is a long chase, and even a Frenchman knows a schooner’s weakness.’

As he spoke, eight bells were struck, by which I had the pleasure to find that it was my turn to stay on deck for the next four hours. However, I had had no supper, and was wet through, and so, desiring Chestree to keep my look-out for a short spell, I went below, where, after shifting my clothes, I demolished nearly the whole of a remarkably tender and well-flavoured piece of hung beef, which, with a caulker of cold brandy grog, restored my good-humour.

I left Shelvocke, who had come below as wet and hungry as myself, at the table, and went on deck and found the weather clearing

fast, but the wind increasing, and the schooner beginning to curtsy to the surges which ran under her. She was heading so as to hit the French coast between Havre and Fécamp, but on an errand that had become intelligible enough, now that we could see about us ; for almost the first object I beheld after leaving the cabin was the shadow of the brig right ahead of us, a large square blot which the telescope resolved into a whole cloud of canvas.

I put my head into the skylight and gave the news to Shelvocke, who presently arrived. He examined the chase in silence for some moments—I should say a whole minute—and then exclaimed :

‘She is undoubtedly within range of the bow-gun, Mr. Madison, should not you think ?’

‘A ball would have all its work to reach her, sir.’

‘Well, as I look again, you may be right. But even were she within range, it is not our policy to signalise any friends of hers hovering in the neighbourhood, by blazing away with one gun, when, with a little patience,

we shall be able to bring our broadside to bear.'

'I agree with you, captain; here is the Calvados Gulf under our bows, and there are batteries enough along the coast from Barfleur to Antifer to inspire the French cruisers in these waters with unusual pluck.'

'I say,' he remarked, laughing, 'the brig's people will think us the very devil when they look astern and find us sticking to their skirts. But did they really suppose they could amuse and throw us off the scent by dropping a lantern in a tub overboard, and squaring away to the east'ard? I should like to know how many times that trick has been tried within the last fifty years, and how often it has succeeded. I *knew* she must try for Dieppe or some more southerly port, and I was right, you see. Do you think we gain on her?'

'I do not, sir. If anything she is leaving us. By the lumping shadow she makes she appears to have stunsails aloft and aloft.'

The enemy had manœuvred so as to bring the breeze into the quarter that gave the *Tigress* her poorest chance of sailing.

Every cloth on the schooner that would hold wind was exposed, but it was all of no use ; we could not shorten our distance from the chase, and though she remained well in sight over our bows, she had edged a long distance out of gun-shot.

Shelvocke's obstinate spirit was aroused. When he perceived that he did not gain on the enemy, he turned the men up to get the studding-sails upon the schooner, but in the midst of the work the top-gallant studding-sail boom snapped short off at the iron, and the sail blew away like a puff of smoke. In truth, the wind was fast freshening into a moderate gale that had put every vestige of the ponderous thunder-clouds to flight, and replaced them with lines of light scud that blew like sheets of muslin across the stars. Had we been beating, there was wind enough to have reefed our sails ; but being astern, its force was sensibly diminished by the speed with which the *Tigress* drove before it. Under this increased pressure the schooner ran fiercely, heaping the water up in froth above the hawse-holes, and raising a tall sea on each quarter ; and that the brig maintained

and even improved her distance from us proved her the possessor of qualities that would not only test the capacity of the *Tigress* but harass the obstinacy of Shelvocke, as well as challenge his seamanship.

Suddenly the Frenchman hauled his wind about four points, keeping all his studding-sails aloft. The inclination of the shadowy outline of the vessel was at least forty degrees under the lateral pressure of the heavy wind, and her swinging boom soared up from her side like a bowsprit. Finding that she could beat us in scudding, she was going to try us with her tacks aboard, her people evidently having confidence in her heels, and eager to reach their own coast by the shortest cut.

The instant she shifted her helm we altered ours ; but scarcely had we got the wind abeam when crack ! the jib-sheet parted, and before the down-haul could be manned, the sail had flogged itself into rags. I watched our spars anxiously. It was impossible to know how the shot of the brig had told ; one crash of splintering wood had certainly followed the discharge of a gun, and I waited to know

what spar had been wounded by seeing it go overboard. But nothing gave, though our press of sail was enormous ; indeed I never before in all my life saw any vessel so driven as the *Tigress* was now : the lee rail of the high bulwarks was almost flush with the seething foam ; standing on the deck was like being on a steep hill-side ; she did not rise to the seas, but cut clean through them, shipping whole oceans of water, which came rushing aft as high as a man's knees along the lee-scuppers. She took four men to steer her, and I saw the binnacle-light shine in their sweating faces, and watched them tearing off their coats and loosening the collars of their shirts, and baring their arms to the shoulder. The booming and bellowing overhead was deafening, and powerful as was Shelvocke's voice he had to send Tapping for his speaking-trumpet before he ventured to deliver an order.

At this moment the scene was one of wild beauty : the schooner almost on her beam-ends hurling through a whole acre of snow-white foam, the dark and frothing waters tossing wildly to windward ; above us a sky

full of bright stars and flying scud, and ahead the leaning shape of the brig as steady as the schooner under the sweeping gale, and leaving astern of her a wide white creaming wake whose seething extremity seemed to meet the very stem of the *Tigress*.

But the square-rigged vessel never yet was built that could dispute the lead with Hannay's privateer under these conditions. The brig was every moment looming larger and larger as we gained upon her.

'Make ready the bow-gun!' shouted Shelvocke through his trumpet. 'Let her go off a point'—and when this was done—'fire!'

The flame flashed out of the head of the schooner, and a smother of smoke fled down upon the water; but simultaneously with the explosion, the brig put her helm up, squared away her yards, and in about ten minutes' time had forged out of gun-shot distance again.

This was very irritating, but as Shelvocke had said on a previous occasion, it could not be helped. We held on steadily; and shortly after the dawn had broken in the east, I went

below to look at the chart, and found that if this strong wind held, we should in all probability make the French coast a little to the north of Cape Antifer by seven o'clock. I had been up all night, and was tired out, and the sound of ship's bell was never more grateful to my ears than the eight strokes which indicated four o'clock, and changed the watch. Before I left the deck the sun had risen, and the sky all away on the port-bow was a vast sheet of frosted, rosy-tipped silver, and in the west and south a bright light blue, and the sea a streaming, running, throbbing, and foaming tract of waters, with a strong wind sweeping noisily across it, and vacant as a desert save in the point towards which the jib-boom of the *Tigress* arched, where there shone a white form no bigger than a man's hand, but which the telescope proved to be the French brig, that had widened her distance to between four and five miles, and whose hull under the broad and tall space of canvas she exhibited was like a car under a Lussac balloon; and one could almost have imagined that the whole thing would soar into the air and be blown away into the silver sky, so delicate and

lily-like and aërial did the fabric look upon the leagues of sea which poured their boiling surges towards the rising sun.

I went to my cabin and turned in and fell asleep, and had slept two hours, and was dreaming of being grasped by the throat by a huge French grenadier, whose immense pistol (the cold muzzle of which, by the way, I distinctly felt like the snout of a dog against my right temple) threatened a most murderous *coup de grâce*, when I was aroused by young Peacock putting his hand on my shoulder. I opened my eyes.

‘The crew have been called to quarters, sir. We have hove up the French coast, and I think Captain Shelvocke means to give us some fun, sir,’ shouted the youth, and immediately ran on deck.

I was there almost as soon as he, and found the crew tumbling up out of the hatchways, and some of the watch hauling down the studding-sails, and others handing the square-canvas, whilst the schooner, with the wind a point before the beam, into which quarter it had veered within the last five minutes, was racing along at a speed that made every bone

of her tremble as though she must go to pieces like a pack of cards. Right ahead loomed the pale chalk cliffs and green summits of Cape Antifer, with the land on either side shelving away south and east until only little blobs of hazy film trembled upon the white refractive line about the dark waters of the horizon.

The brig lay broad in view upon our lee bow, having braced up to meet the shift of wind, and her hull almost buried in the veil of foam she tore up. She had evidently been trying for Fécamp and the Criquebœuf batteries, but probably fearing that the wind would haul further to the eastward, was hoping to get the land aboard, so as to bring up and fight us under the shelter of a fort to windward of Cape Antifer.

‘Ay, but fighting, I am afraid, is the last infirmity of those noble minds,’ said Shelvocke, to whom I had put the above probability, speaking with bitter contempt, and looking harassed and weary, though he had managed to snatch an hour’s sleep whilst I was below.

We soon began to close the chase, now that

we had the wind abeam, and I had a good look at her through the glass.

She was a handsome vessel, probably fifty tons bigger than the *Tigress*, with a gaily decorated stern, and a broad white streak along her sides, out of which forked the muzzles of her guns. She had large square tops painted black, wide channels, and sat low on the water, and was apparently a very powerful boat. Whatever mischief we had done her aloft was repaired, nor could we suppose, having regard to the tremendous press of canvas she carried, that we had wounded her spars. If she had suffered at all, it was in the hull, but to what extent, as the sequel will show, we were not able to ascertain.

Suddenly she hoisted French colours, and fired a gun at us, probably to alarm the look-outs on the heights, for her people must have been perfectly well aware that we were out of range.

‘Answer that challenge, Mr. Peacock!’ called out Captain Shelvocke. ‘Hoist the ensign!’

Having said which, he jumped on to one of the guns, and stood with his arm round a

back-stay, watching the chase with an expression of extraordinary eagerness.

Most chases are mere lotteries, for the issue of a pursuit at sea can seldom be calculated on. Shelvocke's hope in following the brig had evidently lain in a shift of wind, or in being able to get within range, and to cripple her so as to oblige her to make a stand and fight. The natural obstinacy of his nature, moreover, was not a little inflamed by the attempt that had been made to board us, and that had failed entirely because of the vigilance of the look-out we had kept and his sagacious suspicions that something of the kind would be ventured.

The sight of the towering French cliff now lent a new significance to the pursuit. This was the first time the *Tigress* had been in sight of the enemy's coast, and one thought of the wrongs done to humanity by the inhabitants of that soil, of their hatred of England, of the scores of one's fellow-countrymen languishing in its gaols. Indeed no words can express the bitter feelings excited by those lofty heights of chalk clad with verdure that gleamed like silk in the sun. The faces of

our seamen darkened under the moods which the sight of the French shore aroused. The children of the Englishmen of this period will never be able to gauge the hatred of the French that fired the hearts of their fathers, and made them the most deadly and disastrous enemies the arms of France ever encountered. I noticed some of our men, after they had looked awhile at the shore, feel the edge of their cutlasses and slap the breeches of the guns with gestures of uncontrollable excitement. No quarter-deck speech ever awakened such deep and eager passions as were excited in our men by that line of coast, growing whiter and taller and greener as we raced after the brig, with the water flying in sheets over the forecastle, and the air all around filled with the roaring of canvas.

The brig continued to fire at us, though her balls dropped a long way short, but Shelvocke took no notice of this. It was plainly her intention to seek the shelter of a fort that protected the entrance of a small bay at the base of a very noble green and fertile valley, whose rich, deep verdancy beautifully contrasted with the dazzling white of the chalk

cliffs, and it remained to be seen whether she would be able to reach that shelter before we could get between her and the land.

The eyes of every man and boy in the schooner stared forwards at the brig, and it was strange to behold the set, lowering expressions on their faces : how some stood with their rugged, naked arms locked upon their breasts, and some leaning with their hands upon the guns, and some crouching like leashed hounds to gaze through the windward ports, and all of them preserving a dead stillness ; for the end of this long pursuit was at hand. It was a matter of time only whether we should get to leeward of the Frenchman. If she reached the protection of the fort, Shelvocke was the man to cut her out ; if we passed her, and separated her from the land, we were sure of a hot action. In either case warm work was certain, and it was being led up to by as exciting a chase as ever took place on broad waters.

All this while she kept hammering at us with a couple of long eighteens, which they had trained through her after-ports, and at every discharge the shot flashed up the spray

nearer and nearer. As she was now certainly within range of our bow-gun, Shelvocke gave the order to peg away at her in return ; but owing to the lively motion of the schooner I could not swear that we did her any mischief. No sooner did we begin to fire than the fort opened, by way, I suppose, of encouraging the brig. To judge by the volumes of smoke that went pouring away towards the giant headland, this shore-battery mounted heavy metal ; the boom of the ordnance struck the ear with a ponderous note that sounded high above the yelling of the wind and the roaring of the passing waters. In ten minutes from this time the brig was not a mile ahead, and her shot were flying over us.

‘ I fear we shan’t be able to round her, sir,’ said I to Shelvocke, who still stood on the gun, steadying himself with the back-stay. ‘ Would it be worth while to luff and give her a broadside ?’

‘ They’ll be in a mess in a moment or two if they don’t mind their eye,’ he replied. ‘ I see something that looks uncommonly like broken water a little ahead of them, and

they're steering for the thick of it. How far off is that coast, think you ?'

'Four miles, sir.'

'Just see what soundings the chart gives, Madison.'

I ran below, overhauled the chart, and returned.

'Fourteen to eight close in shore, sir, but there's a shoal with twelve feet at high-water mark, that bears W.N.W. from the fort.'

He made no answer, but kept his eyes steadily fixed on the brig. Now and again I could see the water spirt up under the discharge from the fort, well to windward of the brig, which the shot were more likely to hit than ourselves ; but the leaping and glancing of the foam under the strong wind made the surface of the water extremely confusing.

I levelled the glass at the battery that was situated on the left of the bay, and that stood out in bold relief against the deep green of the valley and the paler verdure of the further inclines. It mounted six guns, three pointing seaward to the north, and the others covering the mouth of the bay ; they were being fired one after another, and through the telescope

I could see the red tongues of flame flash out, and the white, dense clouds of smoke go sluggishly to leeward, with a glimpse of figures moving on the outer walls and the sparkle of small arms and military accoutrements.

There were a couple of small coasting sloops at anchor in the bay, pitching and tossing consumedly on the troubled waters ; the glitter of the high surf was visible all along the coast, but with the exception of a small cluster of huts upon the slope a long way behind the fort and on the confines of the valley, I could perceive no sign of human habitation ; nor, away from the fort, was there any living creature to be seen.

I was ogling the enemy's territory with active curiosity, when a cry from Shelvocke made me dash down the glass and spring to his side.

‘ Hard aport ! in with that fore-sail ! let go the jib-halliards ! ’ he pealed through his trumpet : and as the schooner plunged round into the wind, chopping the heavy seas which ran to meet her, and with the canvas so furiously shaking overhead that the shrouds

and back-stays rattled like the contents of a china warehouse to a passing van, he shouted: 'Steady! bear a hand, men! keep your stations at the port-guns—you have her under your muzzles—now you may physic her!'

And whilst thirty of the crew were brailing in, and clewing up, and stripping the schooner of half her canvas, our port broadside was fired, raising, what with the slatting of the sails, and the stamping of the men, and the flinging down of coils of rope, and the splashing of water, and groaning of timbers, and hooting of the wind, such a hullabaloo as would have set an inexperienced hand calling upon heaven to have mercy upon his soul.

The moment I could find time to look about me I saw the reason of this sudden change in our movements. Just as Shelvocke had hoped or predicted, the brig's people had run the unfortunate craft ashore on the shoal whose existence had been observed by our captain's keen eye when two miles away from it. The vessel lay on her port broadside; the thumping blow she had dealt herself had carried away both top-masts, and as she had a press of sail at the time—royals, studding-

sails, every cloth, indeed, that she could stretch—she presented one of the most perfect images of confusion the imagination could picture forth.

Her masts, however, did not go until after we had given her our broadside, and when Shelvocke saw her deplorable condition, the word was passed to cease firing. They continued blazing at us from the fort, but whether because we were just out of range, or because they guessed our humane motive in not playing on the brig, they presently stopped their cannonading, and their attention, as well as ours, was fixed on the hapless chase.

Very fortunately for her people she had fallen over so as to expose her higher side to the sea; had she slanted her decks to the surges which broke against and burst in smoke over her, she would have gone to pieces in ten minutes. The speed with which she was travelling at the time she struck, had run her high on the ridge: she lay with two-thirds of her copper exposed and glowing like a furnace in the sun, her bow hove high, and her wrecked spars and sails tossing and

beating and looking like a mass of tangled sea-weed alongside of her.

There was a whole swarm of people gathered aft, and apparently utterly helpless, and another equally helpless crowd in the bows. They made no effort to save themselves, nor was there any appearance of a rescue from the shore. Shelvocke beckoned me to him.

‘Madison,’ said he, ‘those people must be rescued, and by us; not only for the sake of our common humanity, but for the sake of our reputation as generous enemies. I select you for this task, as I should for any job requiring nerve and judgment.’

I immediately sung out to the boatswain to pipe the crew of the first cutter away. This was a large, powerful boat, pulling twelve oars. A flag of truce was thrown into her and fixed in the bows, and as we shoved off, a gun was fired to windward, and a white flag hoisted at the main, which a few moments after was answered by a white flag at the battery ashore.

The water was even more lively than I had supposed it. At one moment the boat would

be thrown up to the summit of a roaring sea, whose boiling crest foamed above the gun-wales and covered the knees of the men and the floor with hissing spume, that crackled like pods of sea-weed under the tread, and we seemed to look down, as from a hill-top, upon the surrounding plain of waters, where in one place lay the beautiful schooner bowing to the surges like a noble steed, whose curved neck and pawing forefoot betoken his eagerness to be gone, and where in another place lay the dismantled and motionless brig over which the sea was tossing a haze of spray, while her hinder-part was black with human figures watching us; and then in another moment down we would sink between two walls of bottle-green water, in whose translucent depths one now and again could catch fleeting glimpses of a fragment of marine vegetable torn from its sandy soil, or the horn-like yellow of an immense jelly-fish, or a five-finger washed from its home among the rocks, while not a breath of air reached us to cool our cheeks, though the spray flew over our heads in wreaths and clusters like masses of snow.

There was but one way of boarding the brig, and that was on the lee-bow, the raffle that was overboard being chiefly on the port quarter. The poor creatures raised a quivering sort of cheer when we were near enough to hear them ; they guessed our errand, and really our country had furnished them with some substantial grounds for believing in the humanity of English sailors.

I steered the boat to leeward and made signs to the people on the forecastle to coil down a rope ready to pitch to us ; and when we had the rope's end aboard, the boat was hauled cautiously towards the wreck. The hull of the brig acted like a breakwater, and the sea was tolerably smooth under the lee of her, though the moment we got within the range of it we were drenched through with spray. She lay in about ten feet of water, and, watching our chance, ten of us jumped aboard, whilst the men left in charge of the boat veered out the line, and the cutter went clear of the wreckage, and lay rising and falling like a cork.

I never recall the scene of that brig's decks without feeling how beggarly words are as

reflectors of facts. Benjamin West might have painted it, but even the artist could only show it as it appeared at one instant of time ; the swift and endless changes of posture, the despairing expressions of face, the *throbbing* of colours supplied by a thousand passionate motions and gestures, could only be conveyed by as many pictures. And then the uproar ! the lamentations, the imprecations, the supplications—tumbling inboard that vessel was like dropping into the infernal regions.

In the first place the vessel lay bilged at an angle of about fifty degrees. The shooting of the seas over her side filled the deck to leeward with water, and I was up to my armpits the moment I got aboard. The guns had fetched away and helped out the frightful mess of rigging, hen-coops, hatchway-gratings, round-shot, pikes, muskets, splintered wood, and a hundred things besides, which choked the lee-scutters. At least a dozen dead bodies lay floating or sunk in as many postures in the water that extended like a small lake from the main-hatch to the rail of the lee-bulwarks. At each end of the vessel there was collected a dense crowd of men—soldiers

and sailors—indiscriminately mixed, and at least a score of priests. I scanned the mobs eagerly, and was glad to find no women.

I own I was amazed to observe how helpless these creatures had been made by fear. There were two good boats hanging at the lee davits, and a cutter on chocks amidships, big enough to hold thirty persons. Yet no one had thought of getting these boats afloat.

Clinging with my hands, and shoving with my feet, like a dog on all-fours, I made shift to scramble clear of the water, and steadying myself with my heels against the coamings of the main hatch, I sung out in my native language to know if there was anybody aboard who could speak English. Two or three voices answered, and a priest (as white as wax) waved his hand to engage my attention.

‘Do you speak English, sir?’ I shouted.

‘Yes, I speak,’ he replied, in a good accent.

‘Then please order silence to be kept. You may say I shall make no effort to save them if they don’t stop their shindy.’

He hollowed his hands and delivered my message with a shriek like a woman's. It produced the effect I wanted; the people grew as silent as death, and nothing was to be heard but the thunder of the seas striking the brig, and the sharp artillery of the spray lashing the decks and the water beyond.

‘Where is the captain?’ I shouted.

The priest pointed to the water where the bodies lay with a gesture inexpressively mournful and pathetic.

‘Are there no officers aboard?’

The priest glanced behind him, there was a movement among a group of soldiers who stood wedged together and holding on to one another, and a very small man, not above five feet high, and looking more like a corpse than a living mortal, was unceremoniously thrust forward; but the moment the hands which propelled him let him go, he fell down, and would have rolled into the water in the scuppers, had not one of my men caught him.

This poor little creature, who appeared to have been badly wounded, proved to be the

first lieutenant ; but, as he was in a condition to be of no possible service, and as it was evident that the other officers were too much ashamed or too much alarmed to stand forward and offer to help, I resolved to waste no more time in questions, and telling my men to turn to smartly and cut away the wreckage that we might get the boats overboard, I requested the priest to order the French seamen to assist my crew, but at the same time to require the soldiers to remain where they were so that the sailors might not be hindered by crowding.

The sight of the *Tigresses* going to work on the laniards and gear with knives and cutlasses, hacking away, some of them with the water up to their throats, and laughing loudly as the seas came foaming down upon them, heartened the Frenchmen, who, giving a cheer for the brave English, fell to work like men. In ten minutes' time the wreckage was cut away and floating free of the brig. The gangway was then cleared, the boats lowered one after the other, and the soldiers, priests, and twenty seamen crowded into them.

Before the first boat shoved off, the priest who had acted as my interpreter stood up to ask whether they were to row for the schooner or the shore, probably expecting that I should claim them as prisoners ; but when I said the shore, every man shouted *Vivent les Anglais !* The soldiers waved their hats, the sailors (out of compliment) huzzaed after our British fashion of cheering, and my poor priest seemed to bless me with his extended hands. It was a touching scene, and I was heartily glad to be an actor in it.

We had great trouble to get the big cutter out ; happily the main-stay stood, and by clapping tackles on to it and the fore-yardarm, we managed to sway the boat out of her chocks and drop her overboard without accident. The remainder of the crew and soldiers were numerous enough to load her down to the gunwales. I saw that she would be too full to go safely through such a sea as was running, and therefore got our own cutter alongside, and stowed fourteen Frenchmen in her. This done, and having ascertained that nothing living was left aboard, I jumped down the main-hatch, and with a flint and steel set fire

to the brig in three places, after which I got into the cutter, and with the French boat in company pulled away for the shore.

I do not believe the Frenchmen who were removed from the brig cared twopence about our burning her ; indeed, the soldiers, as we shoved off, exhausted themselves in imprecations upon her, and again and again I burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter over the extraordinary grimaces, the shrugs, the extravagant gesticulations of the people we had stowed away in our boat. They all spoke together, the opening of one man's mouth being the signal for all hands to burst out, and after awhile the poor fellows actually began to *sing*, and were joined by the others in the boat astern of us, though the spray flew over us in sheets, and as we neared the bay the popple grew ugly enough to demand the closest vigilance.

On the road it occurred to me that we ought to have brought the body of the French captain with us, that he might be buried with honours ; but when I turned to the Frenchmen, and in my broken way suggested that we should return before the fire laid hold of

the brig, and that I would take the risk of procuring the corpse, they all to a man shook their heads and flourished their hands with an air of passionate contempt, and said—so far as I could gather from the rude *patois* they spoke—that their captain had proved himself a *fainéant*, a poor creature, and that his memory deserved no respect. They might have said the same thing of the other officers, naval as well as military (for I presume the soldiers had officers to look after them), all of whom had behaved like arrant cowards, neglecting their duty, and hiding among the men when the brig was in danger, and skulking into the first boat that came along-side.

However, I had not much time allowed me to think over these matters, for the sea ran so high as we approached the land, and both cutters were so deeply laden, that there were moments when we were in real peril, and it was not until we had got the southern fork of the bay between us and the tossing surges that I drew an easy breath. Here, close in-shore, the water was smooth, though opposite the tumble was rough enough to keep

the two coasters dancing like circus-horses, and a heavy surf roared upon the white sand and flung a hundred sparkling rainbows upon the deep summer foliage that enriched the gradual slope down to within fifty feet of high-water mark.

The whole spot, indeed, was a perfect paradise, and any man would have thought himself upon a tropical coast, on viewing the deep cool forests of trees which backed the bay, and spread a broad surface of lovely green over the huge hollow in the cliffs which rose on either hand from the margin of the water until they attained an elevation of some hundreds of feet of shining chalk, upon whose summits lay the verdant plains of one of the most picturesque of the French Departments, resembling at that distance an endless carpet of embroidered green silk.

Immediately opposite the beach where the people were landing from the boats which had first left the wreck was the fort, built on a point of headland about sixty feet above the sea ; the white flag still blew from the tall pole in the centre of it, and the outer wall was lined with soldiers watching us.

Stumbling upon such a scene as this, set like a gem on the breast of a towering range of cliff, was like falling asleep in the middle of the sea, and dreaming of a beautiful land. The uniforms of the garrison at the fort, mere spots of colour upon the grim, coarse outer wall ; the white flag streaming against the green of the outer slopes ; the dazzling white of the immensely high cliffs, stretching far away into the sea ; the line of boiling surf that extended, like a pile of snow which had been swept off the ocean, from the base of the cliffs as far as the eye could reach, down to the northern curve of the bay ; the tumbling waters blowing up in smoke upon the dancing greens and whites of which the sloops were leaping, with the sunshine flashing in their streaming sides, and kindling stars of blinding brilliance in the glass upon their decks ; the shaggy mass of green stretching for miles up the gigantic defile, and the glittering silver of the circle of white sands, in the southernmost corner of which were collected the crowd of soldiers and sailors and priests who had scrambled ashore out of the boats—formed such a scene of unfamiliar

beauty, that to this day it never comes before me without a disturbing sense of unreality.

I headed the cutter for the spot where the other boats had grounded, and no sooner did her stem grate upon the sand, than my Frenchmen toppled over the sides and plunged up to their waists in the water, and splashed ashore as fast as they could wade. Immediately afterwards, the fourth boat grounded, and the haste of her people to land was more diverting still, for they sprang all together, and many of them tumbled on their noses under water, whilst their shakoes and hats floated away to sea in squadrons.

I had leisure now to cast my eye over the crowd, and noticed an officer dressed out in full puff, in a fine blue coat laced with silver, a cocked hat, glossy boots, white nankeens, and a long sparkling sword. He was a handsome old gentleman, silver haired, with dark, shining eyes, and heavily-thatched brows. He proved to be the commandant of the fort, but I did not know this until my priest—who, now that he was ashore, and safe, had gathered a healthy complexion, and whose gentle, pensive, intellectual cast of counte-

nance made me in love for the nonce with the religion that could work so beautiful an expression in the human face—stepped forward, and raising his voice exclaimed in English :

‘ Sir, I am desired by Monsieur le Colonel,’ indicating the figged-out officer with a graceful gesture, ‘ to express to you, in the name of the French nation, his gratitude to you and your noble seamen for your exertions in the cause of humanity. It was in your power, sir, to make us captives by taking us on board your ship ; but you have chosen to complete your admirable mission, and to make it in all respects worthy of your great and courageous country, by giving us our liberty. Sir, I thank you for myself, and for these my comrades.’

And whilst I raised my hat to the colonel, whose cocked headgear swept the ground as he returned my salutation, the priest repeated his speech to me in French for the edification of the people, who immediately murmured all manner of thanks, though I caught one little chap, who, I believe, was third lieutenant of the brig, scowling venomously at me between the elbows of a couple of tall seamen.

‘Monsieur le Curé,’ said I, determined not to be outdone in politeness, ‘you will do me the favour to assure Monsieur le Colonel that it has given us great pleasure to be of use to you ; and—speaking for myself—I may add, I am heartily sorry that the dreadful necessities of war should have brought about the melancholy disaster that has befallen you.’ He raised his hands and looked up to heaven. ‘Monsieur, I will not say *au revoir*, I do not want to meet any of you again until peace is declared between our two countries ; I am glad to have been able to help you ; and so, monsieur, I wish you heartily *adieu*.’

The priest translated this to the crowd while we were shoving off, and as we pulled the boat’s head round, they gave us a loud cheer. I again raised my hat, the men squared their elbows, and off we started for the schooner.

The brig was burning bravely on the shoal in spite of the spray that dashed over her, and dense volumes of smoke poured from her along the water, so that we had like to be smothered as we passed by ; but this was a small matter compared to the risk we ran .

from her guns, and the chance of her blowing up before we should get well away from her. It is true that several of her cannons were under water, but I had noticed that some of her pieces were in a serviceable condition, and we really did not require more than one shot to sink us.

However, we got past without accident, though soon after the *Tigress* had sighted us and put her helm up to meet us, the main-mast and gear of the brig being in flames, fell along the deck, and I had turned my head to look at the astonishing shower of sparks which fled in whole galaxies along the black line of smoke, when the powder caught, and the vessel blew up. We were to leeward of the wreck, and consequently got the full force of the noise, and I never would have believed that the explosion of a vessel of her size could have produced so tremendous a concussion. The whole scene all around, to a height of a hundred feet, was full of smoke and flame, of exploding hand-grenades and bomb-shells, of huge beams of glowing wood and fragments of blazing canvas, and a wonderful sight was the huge main-mast that darted

upwards on fire, like a flaming spear hurled from the hand of a giant, described a curve like the boomerangs mentioned by Cook, then rushed into the sea with the flames in the form of wings all around it, and smiting the foaming surface of a wave, vanished with a loud shrieking hiss, shooting midway its own length again into the air after a short interval, when it lay tossing upon the waters, a charred and blackened spar.

Scarcely had we brought the cutter alongside, and scrambled aboard the *Tigress*, when the white flag was hauled down from the fort, and they opened fire upon us. I have no doubt the destruction of the brig maddened the old commandant. As soon as the fort began, Shelvocke ordered the flag of truce to be hauled down, and the English ensign hoisted at the peak ; the hands were turned up to make sail, and before a fourth round could be discharged at us, the *Tigress*, untouched by the iron showers which fell all around her, was stretching her noble form along the flashing waters, and dwindling the fort into a thing no bigger than a pea upon the green of the beautiful valley of the Seine coast.



CHAPTER VI.

AN OLD FRIEND.



AD the *Tigress* been a King's ship, we should have got some credit for this business. No particular heroism, it is true, had been exhibited, though that was not our fault, for the brig would not fight us ; but we had destroyed a fine vessel, and this exploit quickly following our action with the corvette, would, had we flown a pennant, have brought us some civil letters from the Admiralty, the honour of a gazetting, and better things still. But being only a private ship, the adventure yielded us neither glory, which we could have made shift to do without, nor profit, which was one of the things we wanted.

However, as Shelvocke said, in the speech

he delivered to the men an hour after we had got away from the fort, he had chased the brig in the hope of capturing her, and he was perhaps sorrier than any man aboard that the pursuit had ended so unprofitably for his crew. Luckily said he, the brig was not the only fish that swam in the sea ; he meant to give the Channel another chance or two, as, so far, he had no reason to complain of his luck in these waters ; but he should extend his field presently, and if a cruise in the West India latitudes did not tassel their pocket-handkerchiefs with dollars, it would not be for the want of laying the *Tigress* alongside rich ships.

We cruised for four days without anything particular happening. On the morning of the fifth day we were off the Casquets, a group of rocks to the westward of the clean and tidy little island of Alderney, and we were feeling our way towards the south, and indeed had worked as far as the Schole Bank, when a sail hove in sight right ahead, standing north-east by the compass, and closing the south horizon to us ; for no sooner had her top-sails

risen than we pronounced her a Frenchman.

This was disappointing, as Shelvocke had talked of looking along the coast as far as Granville, where we might hope to have found some business waiting for us. However, the tower of canvas rising ahead advertised us of a great hull underneath, and when we had lain to long enough to see the whole of her (for Shelvocke was not the man to turn tail until he knew what he was running away from) the stranger discovered herself to be a ninety-four, her sides swarming with gun-muzzles, and cannon bristling from her poop, gangways and forecastle.

I searched the horizon around her, suspecting her to be the van of a squadron ; but no other sail was in sight, whence Shelvocke suggested that the Channel fleet having put into Cawsand Bay (as had been reported to us by a small English collier that we had spoken two days previously), this Frenchman had been detached to reconnoitre the island of Guernsey, upon which fertile and pleasant piece of vantage-ground Buonaparte had been

casting a languishing eye for some considerable time past.

There was a noble sailing-breeze blowing, and though the monster astern, on sighting us, had braced up and triced out her bowlines and headed for the weather-gage, neither her presence nor her movements gave us the least uneasiness. Guernsey was within easy reach, and from Petit Bot Bay to St. Peter's Point there was as much protection as we should need. The schooner was put about, the English ensign hoisted, and every stitch of fore and aft canvas set. In a few minutes we found we could drop our friend, or keep her in one place, just as we pleased ; whereupon Shelvocke, who, like the old romancers, loved to make his beauty coquet with the ogres, lowered his gaff-top-sail, hauled up the clew of the main-sail, and took in his flying-jib, though even under this reduced canvas the *Tigress* had to be luffed from time to time, and the wind shaken out of her sails, to prevent her sinking the hull of the looming hooker astern.

Yet I write in no disdain of this French ship, for she was a noble-looking vessel,

though dwarfed by distance and surrounded by the deep, whose mightiness depresses the grandest works of mortal hands into but a mean and little show. Through one of the powerful glasses, which were among the most useful of the *Tigress's* fittings, I beheld the French ship as clearly as though she lay within a quarter of a mile from us, and could have dwelt for hours upon the beautiful fabric peeling the green seas with her metallised cutwater into two bright, oil-smooth waves, which broke into glittering silver at her gangways ; and upon the stateliness of her erect posture under the weight of her swelling canvas ; and upon the snow-white line of hammock-cloths topping the black bulwarks, pierced by the iron teeth of heavy guns ; and upon the delicate black shadows thrown by the stays and braces on the brilliant sails, whose corners were softly shadowed.

By this time it must have been apparent to her people that they might as well endeavour to chase a sea-gull as the schooner ; but they held on after us nevertheless, sailing full and bye, probably provoked into continuing a

useless chase by the sight of our red flag. I believe they imagined we meant to fight them when they saw us shorten sail, for a puff of smoke broke out of her bows, and sailed away to leeward in a growing cloud, and after a while the boom of the report reached our ears. But as she was some miles distant, we did not trouble ourselves to look where the ball dropped.

I was amused by young Peacock coming up to me, and touching his cap, inquire if I knew whether Captain Shelvocke meant to engage the Frenchman.

‘Why, you young fire-eater!’ I exclaimed, ‘are you in a hurry to die that you ask such a question? One broadside from that chap would blow us into dust.’

‘I should like to try that scheme I spoke to you about, sir, and which Mr. Chestree ridiculed,’ said he, fixing his large, dark, melancholy eyes on mine with a look of earnestness in them that would have set many a girl’s heart palpitating. ‘With the captain’s leave I’d undertake to board her aloft, and douse her colours.’

‘I dare say you would if she gave you time.

But we should have to get broadside on to her to enable you to gain her spars from ours ; and how long, Mr. Peacock, do you suppose the guns of that ship would allow us to lie alongside ? Never fear but that you'll meet with something proper to practise your ideas upon, but if you want to catch a shark you mustn't angle with a gudgeon-hook.'

He walked forward, casting lingering glances at the Frenchman over his shoulder.

Shelvocke looked at him as he left me, and crossing the deck, asked me what he had been saying. I told him, and he smiled.

'The lad has great spirit,' said he, with the softened voice and suggestion of fondness I had often noticed in him when addressing the young fellow, or speaking of him. 'I doubt if he'd shirk the ugliest job you could put him into, What think you of his face ? He has a pretty look at times, I fancy.'

'I never met a handsomer nor a more interesting face in a youth, sir. I question if he's purely English. There is a southern tint in the skin, and a soft darkness in the eyes——'

‘Sail ho!’ shouted a fellow on the fore-castle.

There was no need to ask where away, for when I raised my eyes they encountered the upper canvas of a vessel about two points on the weather-bow. She was a full-rigged ship, and making a due easterly course, and shortly after she had hove in sight we raised another sail a little to windward of her, that proved to be a brig.

We watched them anxiously, for if they turned out to be Frenchmen we should, in all probability, find ourselves in a pleasant little quandary, as by wearing and standing down athwart our hawse, they could not only foil our efforts to reach Guernsey, but force us to bring the wind aft, in which case the line-of-battle ship astern would have us at her mercy.

Suddenly the ship hoisted English colours, squared her yards, threw out a couple of stud-ding-sails, and followed by the brig, stood for the Frenchman, whom she had probably only just made out. We now saw that she was a frigate, of what weight of metal it was not easy to guess, as a vessel pierced as she was

for forty guns, might carry more or less than that number; but though she was undoubtedly a crack ship of her class, she looked no match for the huge liner whose soaring heights of canvas seemed to sweep the very heavens, while the brig that accompanied her had the air of an old collier with her badly-stayed masts, dark sails and leaning bulwarks, which overhung her decks like the flap of a Spanish sombrero.

As they came along, the brig about two-thirds of a mile astern of her consort, the frigate threw out several signals: each of them had her boarding-nettings triced up, and it was clear that fighting was meant. The gallant, dashing manner in which they bore down upon their vast opponent, shifting their helm and running for her with no more hesitation or swerving, as they bowled along under a press of sail, than the slogster Mendoza exhibited when he stepped into the ring, set most of our hearts beating quickly.

The magnificent intrepidity with which English seamen—and I would speak particularly of the men of those times—dashed into battle without stopping to reckon up the

enemy's strength and advantages, is a stirring thing even to read about, but the seeing it even but once was enough to give the heart the most inspiring memory one must hope to get out of this life.

I asked Shelvocke what he meant to do.

‘Why, stand by to windward, to help our people if they want assistance. I would gladly give them a hand at once, but those naval officers are as jealous as the very devil of us privateersmen, and I remember the fable of the lion’s treatment of the jackass when the two went a foraging.’

I had been watching the French ship, and doubting by her keeping everything fast aloft whether she meant to fight. Once she star-boarded her helm and went away to leeward, a manœuvre that Shelvocke instantly took advantage of by putting the schooner about. But the *Tigress* had not been five minutes settled down, and buzzing along a course that would bring us close to the English brig, as she followed in the wake of the frigate, when the Frenchman luffed, took in his royals and two top-gallant-sails, and hauled up his courses; and at the same time let fly the

whole of his upper tier of starboard guns at us ; they were thirty-two pounders, and we had fallen within range of them by backing ; half the balls hurtled through the rigging high over our heads, and the rest flew harmlessly astern : nobody was hurt, but a good many ropes which had been taut enough before were flying about in streamers, and the gaff-foresail came down with a run.

I saw by the expression in Shelvocke's face that he was about to order the salute to be returned ; but he checked himself and stood in silence watching the huge ship, whilst the crew sprang here and there, repairing damages and making sail.

Almost immediately after the Frenchman had dosed us, the frigate shortened sail, took a reef in her fore and mizzen-topsails, and put her helm down, being about a mile to windward of the enemy. The brig was coming down slowly, though under a whole cloud of canvas, and as she neared us, Shelvocke wore the *Tigress*, shortening sail fore and aft in order to speak her. By this time the action between the frigate and the ninety-four had commenced, and the hulls of the two ships

were enveloped in dense masses of smoke, streaked here and there with ugly bluish tints, and above which and jutting out like the spires of tall churches from a dense fog, might be seen the lofty mastheads of the vessels, with their pennants streaming against the pure limpid blue of the sky. The metal of the combatants was the heaviest at that time afloat, and the thunderous explosions of the guns resembled the raging of an electric storm ; the very wind was stilled by the hellish uproar, and the waves appeared to have lost their buoyant play.

My attention, however, was diverted by the approach of the brig, and by Shelvocke springing on to the bulwarks and hailing her. They were at that moment shortening sail, and the rigging was dotted with men, whilst groups of half-naked seamen stood quietly at the guns ; the suggestion of discipline was perfect ; and the captain, a fine-looking young fellow, who answered Shelvocke's hail, spoke with the ease and composure of a man out on a holiday cruise.

'We are the English privateer schooner *Tigress*,' sung out Shelvocke, 'and I should

be glad for instructions how to act in this engagement. I don't want to exceed what may be thought my duty.'

'You had better heave to and watch us, sir,' answered the captain of the brig. 'I hope we may not require your help; but should the need arise, I will summon you by hoisting a swallow-tail blue-and-yellow flag.'

Shelvocke waved his hand, and our helm was shifted; for by this time we had neared the frigate, over whom the balls of the Frenchman were flying as thick as peas, and flashing up the water to leeward of us.

By the time the schooner had been hove to clear of the cannonading, the brig had tailed on to the enemy, and added the thunder of her guns to the tremendous bellowing of the others. It was difficult to see the manœuvring, for the smoke clung like white sheets to the spars and hulls of the ships, and filled the whole theatre of the action with a fog that shut out the very heavens for the space of a mile on either hand of the combatants. The cannonading was furious—a man had hardly time to draw breath between the explosions; the glancing of the flames from

the guns upon the pall of smoke was so incessant that one might have thought a great fire was burning upon the water between the vessels, and the deck of the schooner trembled like a house when a heavy waggon passes the door. From time to time one could just catch a glimpse of the English vessels twisting around the French ship as one may have seen a couple of dogs snuffling and running round a tree up which a cat has fled, while whole hurricanes of fire belched forth in double and even in treble lines at a time from the sides of the great liner, who reminded me—as she manœuvred, so as to avoid being raked, whilst the spray leaped about her bows and hung in trails from the stem—of a huge boar brought to bay and turning upon its pursuers.

Presently I noticed the frigate put her helm up and head for the Frenchman's quarter, with the evident intention of boarding; at the same moment the brig was preparing to take up a raking position right athwart the enemy's hawse. But the big ship was admirably handled: I had never imagined that anything approaching such seamanship was

to be found in the French navy. She drove ahead, dropping the frigate astern as she did so, and giving her the whole strength of her broadside as she passed. The fore and main topmasts of the frigate fell under the discharge, as though men had been sent aloft to saw them off. A few moments after, the Frenchman's jib-boom forged over the brig's fore-castle under the topmast-stay; the brig had backed her yards for a stern-board, to escape the collision that threatened to cut her down, and the enemy's jib-boom, like a giant's hand upon the stay, bore down the little vessel's fore-topmast with a crash and uproar of splintered wood. The brig dropped to leeward, carrying the Frenchman's jib-boom with her, and with her bow dead on end to the liner's broadside that was let fly at her, with what effect I could not imagine, though I judged it as deadly a raking as any vessel ever received from another. With an alertness that would have done credit to the best commander in our navy, the Frenchman was got before the wind, flinging the fire of his port-batteries at the frigate as he passed her, and leaving her a mere confused heap of

wreckage aloft. Cloth after cloth was thrown out, and with every spar standing save the mizzen top-gallant mast, the enemy stood to the south-east, running up her studding-sails in her eagerness to escape, and with crowds of men aloft splicing, knotting, fishing, and in every practicable way balsaming the rigging that it might carry them home.

The two English vessels, like men who had been knocked breathless and blind, hung uselessly upon the gleaming surges, and it was a sight to see the smoke of the finished battle floating in a huge wool-white cloud away ahead of the Frenchman, whose canvas shone like marble against it.

I noticed Shelvocke pacing in short turns at the extreme end of the quarter-deck. He beckoned me to him with a toss of the head, and said hurriedly :

‘I should like to follow that ship. Her capture would beautifully turn the tables on the epaulets,’ his nickname for naval officers, ‘who cheated me out of the honour of beating the corvette. But,’ glancing at the huge square tower that was fast drawing towards the horizon, ‘she is too strong for us alone,

and those vessels are as useless as cocked-hats now. Starboard your helm,' he exclaimed to the fellow who was steering, 'and let her drop under the frigate's stern.'

As we approached the two vessels which lay within pistol-shot of each other, we got a better notion of the mischief the Frenchman had done them. There were some hands over the side of the brig examining the shot-holes, her pumps were working furiously, and streams of water, coloured crimson by the carnage of the decks, gushed from every scupper-hole. There were several dead bodies floating under her bows, their arms and legs and their heads on the limber necks tossing with horrible and extravagantly grotesque gestures on the wobbling waters. Her port amidship bulwarks had been shattered to fragments, leaving exposed the deck that exhibited a ghastly spectacle of dead and dying and wounded men, mixed up with splinters of spars, heaps of rigging, sails, timbers of boats, and a hundred other things whose wrecked condition left them unrecognisable and nameless. A small group of men, naked to the waist, and bespattered with

blood and black with the grime of the guns, were working the chain-pumps ; others were making some half-hearted efforts to clear away the raffle, but I could not count above twenty living persons in all, though her decks, God knows, had been full enough when we hailed her on the way to the engagement.

On the other hand, whilst the frigate looked almost as complete a wreck aloft, her hull was comparatively uninjured, nor did she appear to have many men hurt. Her crew still made a great swarm, and they were all hard at work repairing damages and rigging up a pair of shears, and making ready to sway a jury-topmast aloft ; while her officers ran to and fro singing out orders, and the boatswain and his mates piped like canaries in different parts of the vessel.

The captain, a tall, gaunt, yellow man, with a ring of hair round his face that gave him very much the appearance of a Madagascar ape, sat on a skylight rubbing the top of his left knee, that had probably been grazed by a shot. As we glided slowly past, Shelvocke hailed him to know if we could be of any

use, and was answered by a surly 'No!' the fellow scarcely deigning to glance at us as he replied. The blood flushed Shelvocke's face, and with a quick gesture of the hand he motioned the helm of the schooner to be put down.

'Get all plain sail made, Mr. Madison!' he sung out. 'The play is over, and there is nothing more to keep us;' and presently the *Tigress*, with her head to the north-west, was stealing along the waters which were quieting down with the falling breeze, and growing a deep pure blue, over which in the south hung a sky of exquisitely delicate amber, that reddened into purple where the sun was sinking without a cloud to obstruct his lonely and regal descent. The red and slanting rays of the glorious luminary seemed to be concentrated upon the two vessels, and a whole constellation of ruby-coloured stars sparkled in the streaming sides of the brig, whose hull had sunk low in the water, and between whom and the frigate several boats were plying.

'How reluctantly a vessel goes to her death-bed,' said Shelvocke, watching with me

the sinking brig, and speaking in a low voice, as though subdued by the pathos of this ocean-picture of the mutilated frigate and her slowly-vanishing consort, the leagues of lonely water around, the red glare of sunset that deepened the impressiveness of the scene by the lurid colouring it imparted to the vessels, throwing them into strong relief against the calm sweet amber of the heavens beyond ; 'one thinks of a ship as of a living thing at such a time, and the gurgling of the water in the hold is like the gasping sobs of a drowning man.'

'There she goes, sir,' I exclaimed, as the little vessel cocked her bows to the very fore-foot of her out of water and buried her stern ; in a few moments the hull vanished, and as her lower-masts stuck for a brief pause out of water, methought that the sinking brig might have been likened to some veteran sailor stretching his mutilated stumps to heaven in a last prayer as he went down to his rest among the sands and shells under the sea.

'The action was bravely fought,' said Shelvocke, watching the frigate, who had set a fore-topsail and hoisted her boats, and

appeared to be standing after us, 'though it has lost England a vessel and the best part of a stout crew. The frigate was badly handled at the last. If ever I have the honour of meeting her monkey-faced captain I'll tell him so. Nearly the whole brunt of the battle was borne by the little brig, and had she been properly supported the Frenchman would now be under British colours. Did you notice the frigate's name?'

'Yes, sir; the *Andromache*.'

'I must find out who her captain is. Ill-manners always make me feel malignant. Some day I may chance to be in his company, and I should be sorry to discover that I had missed the chance of calling him a bad seaman to his face for the want of knowing him.'

'He sails his ship large, sir. He has bore away four points.'

'Heading for Guernsey, and the best thing he can do,' said Shelvocke, pulling out a cigar, a luxury that was rarely out of his mouth.

As the twilight faded we lost sight of the frigate, but when the night closed in the wind completely died away, and we lay motionless

on a dark and breathless surface of sea, with an unclouded heaven over us full of stars whose light hung in unblemished yellow flakes in the still water.

It remained calm all that night, and when the sun rose next morning we saw the frigate almost in the same spot we had sighted her in before the darkness fell. The sea was as white as a cotton sheet under the thin, steam-coloured haze that tarnished the blue sky, save in the east, where the reflection of the sun hung in the form of a gigantic silver cone. I feared from the aspect of the weather that we were doomed to spend another long inactive day, but shortly after breakfast the water in the south darkened under a rushing wind that crisped up the foam as a cook froths a syllabub, and it was pleasant to see the swifter currents of air shooting along the surface of the glassy water ahead of the dark line of the approaching wind, like eels snaking off in a hundred directions, and lengthening and contracting as they sped along.

The breeze came dead on end from the French coast, and this decided Shelvocke to

quit that part of the Channel for an English port where he might hope to hear news of a French convoy. Accordingly the schooner's course was shaped for Dartmouth, and we bowled along smoothly before the warm strong wind that blew over our port quarter, until five o'clock in the afternoon, when we made out a large ship under easy canvas apparently standing up Channel; but the moment she sighted us she cracked on all the sail she could set, though without altering her course.

It was my watch below, but I was on deck, lounging in the waist, smoking a pipe and enjoying, as I stood in the shadow of the fore-sail—the foot of which made a noble curve from the fore-mast to the gangway—the cool blowing of the wind that recoiled and breezed down vertically from the hollow of the huge cloths. Chestree was examining the vessel ahead with a glass, and I sung out to him to tell me what she was like.

‘Why, sir, if she's not an English East Indiaman I'll eat my head,’ he answered. ‘I believe I have seen that ship over and over again, though for the life of me I can't think

of her name. Will you look at her, sir ?' and he handed me the glass.

'Hang me,' I exclaimed after a short squint, 'if I don't think—God bless my heart!—of course! I see her now—she is the old *Bombay Castle*!'

'Ay,' shouted Chestree, 'that's her name, Mr. Madison.'

'I see the red capstan on her forecastle—and the black hoops on her mizzen-mast, like the keys of a pianoforte—and the galleries over the stern big enough for the Lord High Admiral to take the air in!' I cried, much excited by this sudden stumbling upon an old friend. 'Mr. Chestree, jump below and tell Captain Shelvocke that his old ship is in sight.'

And whilst he was gone I overhauled the flag-locker, where, among a whole pile of bunting—for besides our mercantile code we carried the colours of every nation that flew an ensign—I found what I sought—Hannay's house-flag, a large, square red flag with a yellow castle for a centre-piece, and a white star at each corner, and told Peacock to bend it on to the main halliards and hoist it.

In a few moments Shelvocke came tumbling up through the companion, and seizing the glass, worked away at the ship with it.

‘Ay, poor old hooker!’ he exclaimed, in a soft voice, such as a man speaks with when he stands looking at the house he was born in, ‘that’s the *Castle*, true enough; I’d know her among a thousand. Lord, Madison, what memories she recalls! I took my first voyage in her, and she’s carried me thirteen times to the East Indies and back. What capers have I cut on her decks on moonlit nights to the tune of a fiddle and a guitar! How passionately have I adored certain ladies—both married and single, alas! alas!—whom we have carried as passengers in that tough old sea-chest! What gales have I weathered, what dinners have I eaten, what friends have I made in her! Old Peppercorn commands her now—he’s commodore, and his broad pennant would be flying had she any consorts in sight. Why, see, Madison! she hoists her house-flag! has the old bucket got the scent of me? Round go her main-yards! Surely nobody aboard of her has ever seen the *Tigress* before!’

He was greatly amazed until I pointed to the house-flag I had hoisted, and then the mystery of the Indiaman's manœuvring was explained.

Rakish and piratical as our schooner looked, the exhibition of Hannay's flag at the masthead abundantly satisfied the *Bombay Castle*, who, with her main-yards aback, her courses festooned in the buntlines, and her bulwarks radiant with the red coats of a small army of soldiers, lay waiting for us to come within hail.

She was one of those amazingly romantic, old-fashioned ships which survive only in the paintings of the last century, with a sort of castellated stern, and a round tower for a poop, and two tiers of guns (half of the lower tier 'quakers'), a low-pitched forecastle terminating in bows absurdly complicated with huge beams of decorative timber, out of which forked at an angle of about thirty-five degrees an immense bow-sprit and jib-boom, rigged with a couple of sprit-sail yards, so that they resembled a *fourth* mast that had fetched away, and was suffered to lie in the position in which it had fallen. The sight of her took

one back to the days of Anson ; yet, as she lay in the mellow afternoon light, with her sails swelling into the blue heavens, and the line of red-coats topping the white hammock-cloths, and the sunlight flashing in her windows, while the green waters broke in foam against her tall sides without stirring the ponderous hull, and her scarlet flags soared at the peak and main like tongues of flame breaking from these delicate points, she made a picture that even the rudest and most ignorant of our crew stood staring at with admiration.

As we rounded to, Shelvocke, who was on the bulwarks holding on to a backstay, was recognised by a silver-haired, grey-faced old sea-dog—a real ancient in a broad-skirted George the Second style of coat, that forked out all around him as though expanded by a hoop, and long boots over jean tights, and a frill that stuck out of his bosom like the back of a perch, who bawled out to him in a cracked old pipe :

‘ Glad to see ye, Shelvocke ; come aboard ! come aboard ! plenty of travelled Madeery left, my boy ! ’

This was old Captain Peppercorn, whom I knew by sight, having been aboard a ship he was in command of at Bombay. A number of military officers and ladies—some sweetly pretty faces among these last—stood around him, and the forepart of the vessel swarmed with soldiers and sailors. Coming upon such a scene as this suddenly, amid the solitude of the sea, so gay with colour, and so charmingly humanised by the ladies in radiant apparel, was like turning out of a dusty high-road, and stumbling accidentally upon a brilliant garden-party. Only darkness and music, and a few strings of coloured lamps, were wanted to have made a kind of Ranelagh of that India-man.

Shelvocke ordered the gig to be piped away, and asked me to board the old hooker with him.

‘I only left her t’other day,’ said he, ‘but it seems twenty years ago since I was in her. Come, Madison, we’ll hear the news and have a look at our old home.’

I was nothing loth; and, after diving into our respective berths to change our coats and polish our faces, we jumped into

the gig, and pulled aboard the *Bombay Castle*.

Old Peppercorn stood at the gangway to receive us, and to our amazement immediately congratulated Shelvocke on his victory over the French corvette.

‘Why, how in heaven’s name got you that news, Peppercorn?’ exclaimed Shelvocke. ‘Are you outward or homeward bound?’ And he stared about him as I did.

Peppercorn had one of those dry, powdery faces which look as if a gale of wind would blow the whole of the skin off in a cloud of dust; his widest grin never yielded a wrinkle, it was like a miller’s smile; and bursting suddenly into an uproarious laugh over Shelvocke’s surprise that was certainly not particularly mirth-provoking, the sight of his face with his mouth distended like the crumb of a loaf with a slice cut out of it, and the tears hopping down his sandy, dry, unfurrowed skin, out of his small, bleared, pale eyes, was so irresistibly funny, that I burst into a shout which I was forced to humour and give free vent to, lest in my effort to suppress it I should make a complete fool of myself.

My laugh proved contagious, and Shelvocke joined in; the thing spread; a stout old major let fly with a voice like a crow; some of the ladies *hearing* him, and *seeing* me, broke into peals of laughter; and in a minute everybody on board the vessel was tossing about in uncontrollable fits of merriment.

‘Lord, Shelvocke, man!’ piped old Peppercorn, drying his eyes on a red cotton handkerchief as big as his main-royal, ‘how you have made me laugh, to be sure! I give you my honour I have never laughed so heartily since I saw Munden as Obadiah. But come along aft! come along aft! let me introduce the captain of the *Tigress* to the ladies.’

And hauling at Shelvocke like a watchman carrying a thief to prison, he dragged him up to the passengers, where he scraped and flourished, and went through the business like a dancing-master.

I kept close alongside, for I wanted to hear how Peppercorn had got to know about our action with the corvette; but he would first send for wine, and ask a hundred questions about Hannay, and the *Tigress*, and home-

news: and though it was no unfamiliar sight to me, yet I found myself watching with great interest the faces of the passengers as Shelvocke told all he could remember about home affairs, and the health of the King, and what was doing in the House of Commons, and who was dead, and so on. I had often, myself, made one of a party of eager listeners, after a year or eighteen months' absence from home, and when the gruff voice of the pilot, usually the first bearer of news from England, was as sweet as music for the tidings it conveyed, and I could sympathise with the attentive faces which thronged around Shelvocke. At last a pleasant-faced, well-bred woman, thinking (very wisely) that she could get more news out of me by asking a few direct questions than by listening to old Peppercorn's diffusive catechisation of Shelvocke, artfully drew me aside, and before long I was surrounded by a dozen ladies, among them three of the sweetest girls I had seen for many a day, whose eyes—I speak of the whole of them—being all fixed on my face, were tolerably disconcerting, as may be supposed of a bashful seaman. However, I did

well enough to please them, though I had never greater reason to deplore my social ignorance than when one of the three darlings—the sweetest of the three too, a creature whose violet eyes and auburn hair filled my slumbers for several nights with more dreams than there are knots in a log-line—asked me if I could tell her whether Lady Olivia (Thingummy—I forget the other name) had married again. Alas! I had never heard of her ladyship, but there was so much agreeable flattery in the implication that I *might* know, and the Beauty who asked the question conveyed by her tone so complete a notion that anybody with the least pretensions to breeding *ought* to know, that I blushed to the roots of my hair when I looked at her, and answered in a faint voice, ‘I had not heard.’

Presently, seeing Shelvocke pull out his watch, I bowed to the ladies and joined my captain, and after exchanging a few final words with Peppercorn, we jumped into the gig and shoved off for the schooner. On the way, Shelvocke, who was in high spirits, and repeatedly waved his hat to the people we were leaving, who returned his

salutation with hat and handkerchief, explained to me how Peppercorn had come to hear about our action with the corvette.

He said that a few hours before the *Bombay Castle* had made Scilly, she sighted a shallop that was tossing upon the water without sails or oars. On coming up to her they discovered five men, who by motions and gestures expressed great suffering and entreated to be taken aboard. They proved to be the survivors of the crew of a French brig that had been fired into by an English cruiser, but had managed to escape ; but, shortly after losing sight of the enemy, the brig sprung a leak and filled so fast that before the boats could be launched, she went down. Five of the crew managed to reach the shallop that had gone adrift when the vessel foundered, righted her, and baled her out, and they had been in her fifty-five hours without food or water, or any means of approaching the land, when the *Bombay Castle* hove in sight. From them Peppercorn had learnt the story of the *Tigress's* action with the corvette, and out of gratitude to their preservers the poor fellows had volunteered more news than Peppercorn

had any interest in ; one of the items being that a convoy of sixty-eight sail, bound for one of the French West India settlements, was to start shortly from Brest, under the protection of a line-of-battle ship, two frigates, and four heavily-armed privateers.

It was this piece of intelligence that had put Shelvocke in good spirits.

‘The old *Bombay Castle* was always a lucky ship to me !’ he exclaimed, ‘and this is a bit of news I am superstitious enough to own I would rather have got from her than from any other source. We have two clear days to run down to Brest in. I shall give up Dartmouth. Only let that convoy get to sea, and I’ll warrant the British cruisers shall not bag our share of the booty.

‘And what is going to baulk that charmer when once you give her the scent, captain ?’ said I, pointing with a glow of pride to the *Tigress*, whose superb hull, topped by the towering masts, and the folds of canvas tinged by the pink light of the setting sun, and the red flashing of her copper as the green and foam-crested surges rose and fell against her sides, I had never beheld in

greater perfection. 'That hawse-hole is like the dilated nostril of a swift and powerful beast, and the muzzles of those guns are eyes which will look five hundred Frenchmen in the face without winking.'

'That's almost bad enough for the House of Commons!' said Shelvocke, laughing. 'But bad as it is, I can make it worse, by saying, that if those eyes did *not* wink when they looked at Frenchmen, I'd pitch them overboard.'

'So much for poetical imagery, captain, as the orator said when he ducked his pate to a dead cat after a brilliant metaphor!'

In another minute we had gained the deck of the *Tigress*.

We hung in the wind in order to see the *Bombay Castle* sail away. Her people knew we were watching her, and went to work like boys under the shadow of a birch. She swung her main-yards, and, having the breeze abeam, ran up her studding-sails; and when I saw her heel over—with the water dark with her shadow, and the tops of the waves crimson with the evening glory, and all her passengers grouped aft and looking

at us over the taffrail, while her bulwarks flickered with the red line of uniforms, and the churned water to leeward flashed with a ruddy tinge along her depressed side that bristled with the short, black muzzles of her guns—my heart went with her: a hundred glad memories of the life I had spent in the old frame rushed upon me. I recalled the silence of the sleeping ship upon tropical seas; the thunder of the hurricanes which filled her with groaning noises, and fogged her decks with flying spume; the toasts of the mess-table; the lonely night-watches; the faces I had met aboard of her, and had forgotten until now; the friendships and the enmities begotten in her—and I thought of the fears and the hopes which had vanished, the dreams which had been dispelled and for the extinction of which my maturer life was thankful, and of the unsuspected things which had come to pass.

Even that receding ship pointed a moral, and I felt myself the better for letting my thoughts run loose upon her.

We waited until she had got well away, and then fired a gun and dipped the ensign

three times to her—a piece of maritime courtesy that she immediately acknowledged with two guns and her ensign. A few moments after the schooner's head was pointing down Channel, and the news was whispered fore and aft that we were bound for the neighbourhood of Brest, and for the wake of a rich convoy that was to cross the Atlantic.

END OF VOL. I.





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